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Jean Mitchell's School

A STORY

BY

ANGELINA W. WRAY

ILLUSTRATED WITH HALF-TONE PICTURES FROM PHOTOGRAPHS,
AND WITH ETCHINGS FROM DRAWINGS BY

AMY ORCUTT BROWN

Bloomington, Illinois

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1902

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Bloomington, Illinois.

To My Sister, Millie.

This little book has been written with the hope that it may bring to some other teacher a message of cheer and inspiration. If it shall in any way succeed in this, the author will feel that it has fulfilled its mission.

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

The emphasis of modern educational thought is on the vital relation of the work of the school to the life of the children. We are told that the teacher is to "live with the children," and that "the school is life and not a preparation for life." This thought assumes a transforming influence in the process of education which no purely didactic discussion of the work of the school can adequately present; an influence which constitutes a dramatic movement in the process, and which can adequately be portrayed only through some form of dramatic literature. No apology, therefore, is needed for publishing at this time, as a book on practical pedagogy, an ideal story of the school in its working order from month to month throughout a school year. In such a story, however, it would be out of place to needlessly inject purely personal relations simply for dramatic effect. It would also conflict with its purpose for it to present a "best way" of teaching subject matter, or of governing a school, although there must be method in all of the work done. And especially would it destroy the highest purpose of this story should it be considered as "showing up" present inadequacies of organization or shams in the schools of today.

The author of *JEAN MITCHELL'S SCHOOL* has assumed that there is a sufficiently dramatic movement in the true work of the teacher to call forth the most heartfelt expressions of joy and sorrow. This movement, moreover, is natural and unstudied, and the reader will be apt to find that both smiles and tears will spring forth, apparently without any cause in the incidents of the story.

Jean Mitchell, by the power of a true teacher and without recourse to special accomplishments, brings a "hard school" into kindly co-operation. One by one the lawless and the churlish among her pupils are won over to a spirit of loving obedience and mutual regard and good-fellowship. One by one the weak and idle are inspired to courage and effort. From the first day, when the story of the battle-scarred flag commands allegiance, to the final day of affectionate farewell, the author makes the reader feel that action, portraying the growth of conscious effort on the part of each boy and girl toward true ideas, should grow out of and belong to the work of the school.

Of the songs and poems that appear in the book, the November poem and the words of the Christmas song were first printed in the *Kindergarten Review*, and both words and music of the two Arbor Day songs were first printed in *Primary Education*, for which papers they were originally written by the author, and recognition is here made of the courtesy which allows their use in connection with this story

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
1. A New Teacher,	13
2. The First Day,	18
3. In October,	32
4. Thanksgiving Plans,	43
5. Joe,	53
6. A Misunderstanding,	68
7. Getting Ready for Christmas,	83
8. The Tree,	95
9. Ben,	104
10. In the Snow,	113
11. February,	122
12. A Disappointment,	130
13. Three Birthdays,	142

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
14. March Winds,	149
15. Pussy Willows,	156
16. April Days,	167
17. Ellen,	177
18. A Letter,	183
19. Harry,	194
20. Arbor Day,	202
21. "All in the Month of May,"	211
22. Memorial Day,	219
23. A Decision,	231
24. The Last Day,	238

ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE.

"One by one the bright faces rose before her" (Frontispiece).

Fringed gentian (Headpiece Chapter I).

Golden rod and blue aster—School house (Headpiece Chapter II).

October (Headpiece Chapter III).

"Ev'y tingle picker's dot a tory!" Facing page 34

"Silver seeds that whirl and sail," 38

"Empty nests are swinging in the treetop high," 42

Red haws (Headpiece Chapter IV).

"One corner represented Holland," 46

Noon time, Facing page 52

"A few late blossoms of witch hazel" (Headpiece Chapter V).

"The andirons standing primly in front of the fireplace," . 59

"A stack of corn stood tall and straight among the withered weeds," 62

"Slender vines that flamed and burned," 67

Rose Hips (Headpiece Chapter VI).

The birds' Christmas tree (Headpiece Chapter VII).

Working for Christmas at the noon hour, . . Facing page 90

Christmas tide (Headpiece Chapter VIII).

The new year and old year (Headpiece Chapter IX).

Ben, 108

"A pine tree laden with snow" (Headpiece Chapter X).

Little ones singing the snowflake song, . . . Facing page 120

"February was rich in suggestion" (Headpiece Chapter XI).

Valentine-day, . . . , 124

The sleigh ride (Headpiece Chapter XII).

Washington (Headpiece Chapter XIII).

"A few violets still nestled shyly among their green leaves"
(Headpiece Chapter XIV).

Pussy Willows (Headpiece Chapter XV).

"Climbing up a twig," 160

Writing letters to the hospital children, . . . Facing page 160

"Peepsie" (Headpiece Chapter XVI).

"A revelation," 171

The Jones farm house (Headpiece Chapter XVII).

Easter lilies, 181

April (Headpiece Chapter XVIII).

Trailing arbutus (Headpiece Chapter XIX).

The apple tree (Headpiece Chapter XX).

"A world of blossoms" (Headpiece Chapter XXI).

"Two Baltimore orioles in the big elm," 217

Memorial day (Headpiece Chapter XXII).

"One country! One language! One flag!" . . . Facing page 230

June roses (Headpiece Chapter XXIII).

"A funny procession" (Headpiece Chapter XXIV).

CHAPTER I.

A NEW TEACHER.



A NEW TEACHER had been engaged for the Morrisville school. There was nothing at all surprising in the fact itself, for teachers came to the place and went away again in a monotonous procession. Now and then some spirit, bolder or less sensitive than its predecessors, remained for a ten-months' term, a feat which was chronicled with mingled respect and admiration by the loungers at the village store; but such victories were achieved only by constant warfare, and the conquerors usually declared with emphasis that a worse school could not be found anywhere.

The boys and girls themselves beheld their instructors depart with few feelings of regret, while they looked forward to the next arrival with eager anticipations of triumph.

The main qualification upon which the trustees strenuously insisted was *strength*. Every applicant for the position was carefully viewed, and if he or she seemed strong and muscular the officials nodded their wise heads, and agreed to "try it once more." The results had seldom justified their expectations, however, and one August the School Board in disgust decided to allow one member to "tackle the business alone." Joseph Martin had been the man upon whom the lot had fallen. He had engaged the new teacher and much to his own amazement had chosen one who did not in any respect meet the chief requirement.

Scotch Sandy, the village oracle, had put him through a rigorous examination on the subject, the result of which had caused the other trustees to sigh dubiously and made Mr. Martin realize his own foolishness all too vividly. He had kept aloof from Sandy as long as possible, but one evening at the store the latter, who had been lying in wait for his opportunity, pounced upon him.

"Hoots! mon, I hear ye ha' engaged the teacher," he said suggestively.

"Yes, I b'lieve so. I'm in a bit of a hurry," and Mr. Martin started toward the door.

"Aweel!" said Sandy stubbornly. "Ye know, mon

alive, that we're a' anxious like to hear aboot the bairns' schulin'. Certes! if ye are in sic haste we'll a' bide your time o' enlightenin' us, but perhaps ye could just ca' back over your shoulder if 'tis a mon or a wumman ye ha' gie the contract to."

The soul that hesitates is lost. The good-natured farmer wavered an instant, then most unwillingly was forced into a chair, while the little coterie of gossips gathered around him.

"'Tis a young lady," he said. "Her name is Mitchell—Jean Mitchell. She's an orphan,—that is, her father's dead. There's a sick mother an' a younger sister an' she's the only one they've got to depend on. She lives away down at Newton."

"Puir bairn! I suppose she's fu' strong an' healthy."

Mr. Martin wriggled. "She's healthy enough. I don't know as she's so extra strong."

"Weel! I'm thinkin' she's a big, strappin-lookin' lassie then?"

"No, no, not exactly. Fact is, she's ruther small."

"Mon! ye don't tell me! however did ye coom to take her? Ye know what an onruly set o' lads an' lasses we ha'. It takes grit to manage them. What ever will a bit wumman do?"

Then indeed was Mr. Martin at a loss.

"I don't know how I came to take her," he stammered. "I 'spose I might as well be plain about it. She ain't nothin' like anybody that ever taught that school since I kin remember. She's little an' she ain't no great shakes at strength, I don't b'lieve, but she's got a mighty pleasant way with her. I told her about our boys an' girls an' how bad they be, but she didn't act none skeered. Fact is, I re'ly b'lieve I engaged her because I kinder wished I'd a-had jest sich a teacher when I was a boy myself. An' ef my Joe's got the sense I calc'late, he'll like her an' treat her fair. She can't do no wuss than the last six or eight we've had, an' goodness knows *they* was *strong* enough!"

Sandy shook his head in complete disapproval.

"Joe, my freend, I gie her a week to stay. I wonder at ye, engagin' her because she had a pleasant way! the puir young lassie! Ye should ha' had peety on her!"

From then until the second week in September the old farmer was forced to listen to many similar opinions. Thrifty fathers and mothers found the new teacher an unfailing theme of interest as they wondered what had caused so sensible a man as Joe

Martin to act so foolishly for once ; while the boys and girls discussed the prospect in jubilant whispers.

Meanwhile in her quiet home at Newton, a brown-eyed girl planned by day and dreamed by night of her first school and how she could best make it a success.



CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST DAY.

The little brown school-house stood at the junction of four cross-roads. In front of it was a strip of sandy soil in which a few weeds were languishing. Back of it stretched the cool green woods.

Down the white road leading to the river the tall goldenrod candles burned brightly in the yellow sunlight, while from every wayside thicket the fringed asters shone like purple stars.

The building itself was low, with a peaked roof. The windows were barricaded with heavy shutters. Through the open door glimpses of the dingy room within could be plainly seen from the road. On the playground a crowd of laughing boys and girls had gathered unusually early on that bright morning in

September, the first day of the fall term. At last a shout went up from the crowd.

"Here they come! they're a-comin'!"

"No, they ain't, nuther."

"Yes, they are. Do 'you think I don't know my own father's white nag?" inquired Joe Martin in withering tones.

In a few moments the white horse stopped in front of the school, the old farmer lumbered stiffly out and extended a helping hand to his companion, towards whom fifty pairs of curious eyes were at once turned. They saw a slender young lady in a cool gray linen dress with a blue ribbon at the throat and waist. Two merry brown eyes, keen and wide-awake, smiled out at the motley crowd. Miss Mitchell looked cool and fresh in spite of the long, somewhat dusty ride, and the fact that Mr. Martin had not been the most cheerful companion.

All the way from the station he had manfully done his duty, disagreeable as it was, and had described so direful a state of school-room rebellion and anarchy that he had really impressed himself, when, happening to glance at his listener he had caught a twinkle of fun in the bright eyes, and somehow or other the conviction

had come to the shrewd farmer that the girl would not easily be driven from her post.

"Good morning, boys and girls," she said pleasantly, as the big trustee tied his horse to a tree and then turned a flushed but beaming face towards her.

"I'll interduce ye in a minute. This here's the school, an' them's the scholars. I dunno where t'other teacher kep' the bell. It used to be out here under the stoop one spell, but blest ef I kin find it now."

"Here it is," said a merry voice, as a black-haired, rosy-cheeked boy of about fourteen stepped out from among his companions.

"Thanky, Joe. Now jest ye step right in, Miss Mitchell, an' I'll git 'em inside in a jiffy."

There was a loud clamor from the bell, a wild rush from all quarters of the playground, and fifty boys and girls of all ages and all sizes, pushed and jostled their way into the room with an uproar that was almost appalling.

Mr. Martin cuffed one or two of the noisiest.

"Ye wild b'ars!" he said, indignantly. "Don't ye know that this is school an' I'm trustee? Be quiet, won't ye?"

He might as well have addressed the wind. The big boys, ten or twelve in number, had rushed for the

back seats, a few large girls stood tittering in the middle of the room, while the smaller children looked timidly at each other and then at the new teacher who was quietly standing by the desk waiting for the confusion to subside. Her brown eyes had already taken note of several things. She saw clearly that there were two leaders, the rough, grave-faced lad whose brows were drawn into a resolute frown, and the bright-eyed mischievous boy who had given the bell to the trustee and was evidently his son. The others, naturally, would follow them at first, and she smiled to herself with the resolve that *they* should follow *her*.

Curiosity finally conquered mischief. The room became comparatively quiet. Mr. Martin took advantage of the first lull.

"This here's your new teacher, boys an' gals," he said. "An' teacher, here's your scholars, an' a powerful onmannerly lot they be, foo. That boy 'way back in the corner is Harry Stevens—wust one in the hull crowd for slidin' out o' things. That one right in front of him is Joe Martin—he's my boy. Full o' mischief as ye kin be, ain't ye, ye rascal? Ef *he* don't behave, jest ye let me know an' I'll settle him. That next fellow is Jack White. He's a sulky chap. Can't git much out of him unless he wants ye to. That big

girl with the red cheeks is Sally Brown an' next is Susie Forbes. Ye won't hev no trouble with the girls. They're as good as gold. Take after their mothers, *they* do. But the boys hev got all the contrariness of their daddies in 'em. But land alive! there's no use in my standin' here an' tellin' all their names. Ye'll find 'em out quick enough, I guess, so I'll leave now, for time's precious these days. Jest be right up an' down with em, now." And away he hurried, leaving the new teacher to meet the situation alone.

"We will open our school by singing," she said in a quiet voice, totally ignoring the dust-covered organ, and the next moment the stirring notes of "The Red, White and Blue" rang out so heartily that the children joined in one by one, until the birds in the trees outside stopped their songs to listen to the unwonted melody. Two other songs followed in quick succession, then taking up the Bible that lay on the desk she read the story of Christ healing the little daughter of Jairus, so clearly and sweetly that the familiar words seemed new.

"Let us repeat the Lord's Prayer together," she said as she closed the book. The ticking of the clock could be heard distinctly as boys and girls alike bowed their heads. But as soon as the eyes reopened the un-

usual sense of solemnity disappeared. Half ashamed of their own reverence the pupils looked around. The hum of voices rose from every part of the room. The boys shuffled noisily. The girls giggled. Even the smallest children threw spit-balls at one another in a sly way.

Miss Mitchell stood perfectly quiet, waiting for their attention. Jack nudged Joe. Joe nudged Will. A few of the pupils began to show signs of interest. Still Miss Mitchell waited, patient and self-possessed.

"Bet you we're goin' to catch it now for makin' so much noise," Joe whispered.

A most astonishing silence had fallen by that time. The prospect of a scolding from a stranger's lips proved alluring.

"Wonder whether she's the sorry kind or the sassy kind," Jack said in an almost audible aside. "If she's the first, she'll say, 'Scholars, you don't know how grieved I am to see you so wild and boisterous!' Here he applied his handkerchief to his eyes and snuffled so realistically that Joe was convulsed with laughter. "But if she's the sassy kind, she'll say, 'I want you to distinctly understand that I'm a-going to have *quiet* in this room, if I *die* for it.' That's what Mr. Jenkins used to say. Remember?"

"He didn't get much of it," chuckled Will, whereupon Jack glared at him and went through sundry pantomimic motions of wrath till Joe gasped, "Don't, Jack! You look just like him. Do you want to kill me?"

"Not till after we get our lecture," and Jack's face turned with animation towards Miss Mitchell.

"Boys and girls, how many of you have ever seen a big parade?"

Utter silence.

"Don't start out much like the regulation scoldin'," murmured the irrepressible Joe. "But appearances are awful deceitful sometimes."

"A *big* parade," Miss Mitchell went on, quickly. "How many have seen one?"

A flutter of hands testified to the growing interest. Little Harold West volunteered some information.

"We all seen the big circus p'rade last week. Tigers! an' el'phants! an' lions! I tell you, it was *fine!*"

There was a burst of laughter from the other boys, but Miss Mitchell took no notice of it. Looking straight down into the child's eager face, she said brightly:

"That *must* have been nice. Do you know, *I* saw a

parade last week, too, but it had no bears nor elephants in it,—not a single one! Instead of them, there were lines and lines of soldiers. It was a bright clear sunshiny day just like this, and I know you would have liked to see that great procession as I saw it, coming marching along, company after company, regiment after regiment, every man in it just as tall and straight as he could make himself. The drums were beating, fifes were playing, and every bayonet glittered in the sunlight as if it had been made of shining silver. And here and there, looking even prouder than the others were the color-bearers. And what do you suppose each one carried?"

As she spoke she had turned to the little square of black board in front, produced a few pieces of colored crayon and made some quick strokes with the chalk.

"O—oh! It's a flag!" cried the children, breathless with interest. And there, sure enough, from the cracked board waved a flag with all its glory of stripes and stars.

"That was what they carried, and very proud they were, too. But after a while I noticed something else coming, and I wondered what it could be, for as it passed along, being carried nearer and nearer, I saw that men stopped cheering and took off their hats in

silence as if it were something very dear and precious. When it came near enough, I saw that it looked like this." A few more quick strokes with the crayon and another flag appeared. "Yes, it was as forlorn as that, all black with smoke, riddled with bullet-holes and stained with blood. It hung in tatters from its broken standard. But you could see from the faces of the brave men beneath it that they loved that old battle-flag with all their hearts, and that to them it was worth even more than the clean, shining, beautiful flags around it. I wonder why, boys and girls."

There was a moment's silence. Then Joe spoke. "It was because they had fought for it, wasn't it?"

"I think so, Joe," and Miss Mitchell smiled at the lad whose eyes had caught a gleam of her own enthusiasm. "They had carried it into battle many times. Perhaps they had seen some of their comrades die for it. And so they loved it with all their might. Boys and girls," she added, and her sweet voice was very earnest. "We wouldn't think much of a soldier who cared nothing for the honor of his regiment, who would turn his back on his own flag, or desert his leader, would we? Now, I'm going to ask everyone of you to be *my* soldiers, to stand by me and by each other all through the year, to be brave enough to be quiet

and attentive even when it is hard work, as it will be often. I'm sure you will try.

"And now all the little folks may draw as many flags as they wish, while I see what these big boys and girls have been studying. Joe, will you please pass these colored pencils to the smaller children?"

Joe flushed with pride. He liked to feel himself of some use. Pleased and important he tiptoed around giving out the pencils and enjoying the glee with which they were received.

The older pupils were soon classified. Almost before they knew it they were writing the copy Miss Mitchell had put on the board, doing their best, too, with the hard capitals, for had she not said that she was almost sure some one in the class would do better than she, and each one was desirous to win the honor.

What strange language and geography lessons followed for the middle classes! For the former a bit of golden rod was freshly broken from its stalk by the door, and the children were asked to tell its story. It was wonderful how much there was to be learned about the familiar flower and what quaint ideas some of the pupils had. How carefully they listened for mistakes, too, for goldenrod's story must be correct,

and then with what expression even the dullest read the result!

The subject in geography was Greenland. Who could take an interest in that far-away country when the thermometer registered ninety degrees and the bees were buzzing around the school-room windows with tempting suggestions of the green woods? Ah! but who could *help* taking an interest if a small traveler, in the shape of a doll, dressed in the Eskimo costume, should suddenly arrive and begin to tell of the scenes in that land of snow.

There was time for a drill in phonics for the babies before noon, and a little finger-play which made them smile with pleasure.

Almost all the pupils brought their dinners. Miss Mitchell watched them with interest as they went out. The older ones gathered in cozy groups laughing and talking. Jack had gone back into his shell of reserve. The animation that had brightened his face had faded away. He walked off by himself. Joe followed, evidently trying to persuade him to join the others, but he gave an impatient shrug, "Keep yourself to yourself, if you want to, then," the younger lad said at last, somewhat indignantly, then ran back to the gayest group where he was soon the center of attraction. Miss

Mitchell looked curiously for Harry Stevens. The boy had made a disagreeable impression upon her. All the others had met her gaze frankly. Harry's eyes had dropped shiftily when she glanced at him. He was evidently no favorite with his mates. After lingering around on the edge of one group after another without receiving any attention, he finally took his lunch and went alone into the woods. Jean felt vaguely sorry.

"I'm coming out soon," she called to the large girls. "It looks so nice out under the trees. I want to try the organ first."

Joe came in to explain that it was out of order, then volunteered to "fix it." He had a "genius for tinkering," he explained, his hands and tongue both working busily as he took off the top of the instrument. Such clouds of dust as followed that performance! Then out came fragments of mice nests, and even a mouldy crust or two, remnants of midnight orgies.

"All it needs now is a mouse trap and a little varnish," he announced after an hour's hard work. "I'll bring both to-morrow."

The afternoon session passed as quickly as the morning had done. When the last good-night song

had been sung the pupils went home in a maze of wonder. What magic had struck the school? One lesson had followed another, but each had contained some wizard touch that made it seem different from those of the old time.

Joe voiced the general sentiment when he remarked as he stopped in front of his father's gate:

"Boys, I guess she's a different style teacher from any we've ever known. I'm goin' to stand by her like she asked."

"So'm I," said Will, heartily, and the little group echoed his words. Jack alone said nothing, but plodded homeward with the old dogged expression around his lips. He was not ready to commit himself.

Miss Mitchell, left alone in the old school-room, gave it a careful examination. Then she, too, wended her way down the dusty white road. She was to board at "Granny" Wilson's, for Newton was many miles away, too far for her to dream of going home until the summer vacation. The long year stretched ahead of her rather drearily. She felt tired and homesick. Oh! for one glimpse of her mother's gentle face! How sweet it would be to hear Ruthie's gay young voice relating the day's experience at the high school! Perhaps they were talking of her just then, wondering

what she was doing and how that hard first day had passed.

"Granny" Wilson was a wise old lady. She glanced once at her new boarder's quivering lips that smiled so bravely.

"You poor child!" she said. "I know how you're feelin'. I remember the first time I went away from home. Don't you mind me, dearie. You'll be all right after you let the tears come."

And then lonely Jean had rested her head on the motherly shoulder and cried until she could cry no more, exclaiming remorsefully when the last drop had fallen.

"Oh! what a baby you must think me! Indeed I didn't know I was so silly."

"Not a bit of it," said the kind-hearted old lady. "An' now just you set down an' write to the home folks, while I get supper."



CHAPTER III.

IN OCTOBER.

SEPTEMBER burned itself away. There was a hint of frost, subtle, elusive, yet all-per-vading, in the air. The maples were radiant with the first glory of their gold and scarlet. They glowed like fires along the winding roads. The distant mountains, usually a misty blue in color, looked more misty and distant than ever.

Inside the little brown school-house fifty happy faces might have been seen every school day. The dreary room had been transformed. Every boy and girl had helped, even the tiniest ones. There were



pretty curtains at the windows. Branches of vivid autumn leaves gleamed against the walls which had been kalsomined a dainty gray. There were clusters of shining brown acorns, prickly green burrs of chestnuts where the glossy nuts nestled in their silky nests, and long slim pods to which some of the milkweed babies were still clinging, while others had started on their journey in the world. Paper cuttings illustrating familiar poems, clay-modelings of tiny baskets and vegetables, and specimens of work in number, language and drawing, held places of honor here and there. The old organ, scraped and varnished till its sides and top shone like satin, stood in front of the room, and there were pictures all along the walls, hung low within easy reach of the smaller children. Most of them were pictures from old magazines, carefully mounted on cardboard so they could easily be dusted.

"Every one has a story," Miss Mitchell told Gretchen when she hung them in their places. "Do you like stories, dear?"

"No'm," was the discouraging answer.

"You don't? Didn't you like to hear last year about the little children and the men and women who lived long, long ago? about the things they did? and the things children in other lands are doing now?"

There was not the slightest animation in the face before her. Dull and phlegmatic by temperament, Gretchen had been made doubly so by training. Some of the other children, however, evinced signs of brightening intelligence, and little Dorothy with her thumb in her mouth demanded shyly,

"Do you know 'tories?"

"Why, to be sure! don't you?"

"No'm." After a moment the mite added, "But *my dran'ma* does."

"Does she? isn't that nice? When does she tell them to you?"

"Nights." Then suddenly carried beyond self-consciousness, "Ev'y night my dran'ma tells 'em. When it's all dark an' I's all tucked up in bed."

On receiving the assurance that there would be many forthcoming from a new source during the year, Dorothy traveled around the room touching each picture with her dimpled fingers and saying: "Ev'y tingle picker's dot a 'tory. E'vy one. Dis one's 'dot one, an' dis an' dis," until Miss Mitchell picked her up and hugged her to her heart's content.

It seemed as if a new spirit had come over the school. Fathers and mothers shook their heads, half-amused, half-puzzled, while they wondered how long



“EV’RY TINGLE PICKER’S GOT A ‘TORY!’”—October.

the charm would last. The older pupils were often seen at the village library. They were not *studying*, of course, but when one is expected to defend one's character as Queen Isabella, Columbus, Ponce de Leon, or some other historic personage, one feels the need of more information than the text-books afford.

One evening Joe asked his father for full particulars concerning the price of hay and oats.

"What ye thinkin' o' doin'?" the farmer inquired playfully. "Goin' to invest your fortune?"

"No," was the hasty answer as the boy bent over his work. "It's only my turn to bring in the examples in 'rithmetic for the class to-morrow, an' I want 'em to be good sensible questions. Miss Mitchell says she likes that kind the best."

Mr. Martin kept a discreet silence until he had tiptoed out to the kitchen. There he slapped his knees and indulged in so many chuckles that his wife demanded the reason for his mirth.

"Teacher 's got our Joe a-workin' 'rithmetic," he exclaimed. "He's in there a-goin' over all the questions an' settin' down the figgers as precise as kin be. She'll do, Mis' Martin. I tell ye that girl 's a wonder!"

There was one thing upon which all agreed. It was evident that the pupils' reign was over. Miss

Mitchell was unmistakably ruler over her little realm. No one quite knew how it happened. She had neither scolded nor threatened. There had been no talk about rules, yet the school was conducted in a quiet, orderly manner. She expected and received prompt obedience. It had not taken the pupils long to realize that careless or slovenly work would not be accepted or excused. She punished when necessary, a trifle severely if anything, but she was quick to forgive and invariably just.

Perhaps it was the sunshine of her own happy nature which attracted them. Perhaps it was the fascination which invested all she said and did. At any rate they were both attracted and interested. The smaller children, especially, thrived in the new atmosphere. They had been almost ignored before, now they received their due share of attention.

No more long tiresome days of doing nothing, of sitting idly, with little swinging legs too short to reach the floor, with open books and half-closed eyes, while outside the open windows the birds piped and the squirrels leaped in freedom. Happy little children! there was plenty of delightful employment under the new regime. And how they worked! how the pink cheeks flushed and the bright eyes sparkled as dimpled fingers busied themselves with the tasks which had

been given, knowing that no effort would go unnoticed; for a moment before each recess the bell rang and each slate was marked, sometimes by a daisy, sometimes a blue or pink star, sometimes a tiny banner, drawn in a twinkling with colored pencils, but precious indeed to the minds of the receivers.

And then the blackboards! I do not suppose that Miss Mitchell ever suspected half the pleasure those boards gave. There was always something new there. The children's eyes turned to them as steel turns to a magnet. Sometimes there was a bit of verse, sometimes the beginning of a story, such an interesting story! and they knew the rest of it would be forthcoming when tasks were done and lessons learned; sometimes there was only a sentence of praise or a suggestion which somehow had a deeper meaning in its written form.

One side-board was devoted to the calendar for the month. There during October pretty sprays of goldenrod glowed in yellow beauty, while beneath in Jack's best style, was printed,

Idly blows the autumn wind,
Summer days are over;
Scarlet-leaved the sumach glows
Above the withered clover.

Through the faded yellow grass
In the meadow sleeping,
All the slender brier-vines
Like threads of fire are creeping.

Slowly in the frosty air
Maple leaves are flushing,
Slower still the little brook
Its happy song is hushing.

Linger on, oh golden days!
Loiter in your glory!
Heart of youth and heart of age
Marvel at your story.

Joy, too full for human speech,
Grief, for words too tender,
Vague regret, that is not pain,
Peace that crowns the splendor.

Silv'ry seeds that whirl and sail,
Fires that flame and quiver;
Sunshine on the quiet fields,
Sunshine on the river.



From the open door the children could see the picture which the words illustrated, and the charm and beauty of the familiar scene came home to them as they had never done before.

"They are all so good to me," Jean told "Granny" Wilson during that second month. "I'm so glad I didn't let Mr. Martin frighten me into giving up the school. Of course they do little mischievous things sometimes, but they try so hard to do what I wish."

Granny nodded wisely. "Maybe they've got sense enough to see you're a-doin' *your* part. I always *did* say there were worse boys and girls than them, if they were handled right. You don't want to get the idea that they're unadulterated *angels*, neither. There's Joe Martin, for instance. Ever see him in one o' his tantrums yet?"

"Joe?" in astonishment. "Why! he's one of my best boys."

Granny's shrewd old face was thoughtful.

"I like the boy first-rate. He's the kindest fellow you 'most ever met. He's got a good father and his mother's one o' the Lord's own saints, if ever there was one, but he's got a temper like gunpowder and he ain't never been taught to control it a speck. Don't care what he says or does when he gets in a rage.

You're new yet and maybe you ain't happened to cross him, but it's bound to happen sometime. And I hope, I *do* hope, for the boy's own sake, that you won't be too kind to him."

Jean looked so bewildered that the old lady almost regretted her frankness. "Here I be, a puzzling you about what will never happen, maybe. Land knows! with fifty children on your mind you've got enough to 'tend to, without my givin' you more to worry over. Don't you think of it again."

Jean did think of it, however. Often when Joe was unconscious of it, she could not help glancing at his bright handsome face with incredulous wonder. Surely it could not be possible that the frank smiling young fellow would ever lose his self-control so entirely as Granny had seemed to think!

The long golden days passed quickly. There were so many things to watch. The woods were a veritable treasure-house, each tree, vine and rock having its own delightful secret which Miss Mitchell would suggest and leave the boys and girls to discover. The birds were beginning to fly southward. Great flocks of them could be seen day after day, passing swiftly over the old school-house. The children liked to watch them, noticing which were first to leave and how the

notes of those that still lingered held a deeper, richer melody and thrilled the air with liquid sweetness. The little ones drew the empty nests and flying birds for busy work, and the larger pupils liked to join in the good-bye song Miss Mitchell had taught them.

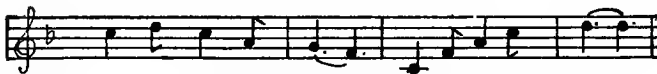
GOOD-BYE SONG.



In the tangled grasses where the daisies grew,



Meadow-larks were hidden all the summer through.



Now their nests are lonely, hear their eager cry,



"We had better hasten! Time to say good-bye!"

CHORUS.



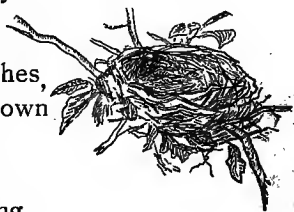
Singing! Singing! Far away they fly,

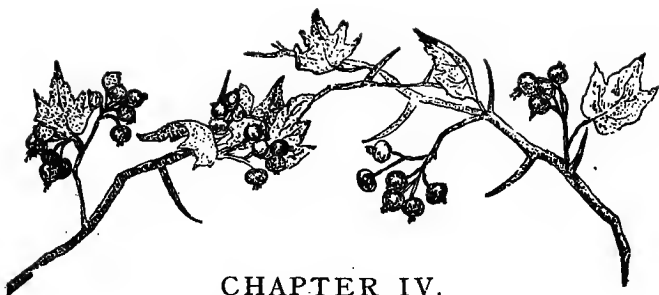


Autumn days are here again, it's time to say "good-bye."

In the shady woodland,
Through the deepest hush,
Rings a song so tender
From each hermit thrush.
Floating through the forest,
Clear and sweet and high;
Hear the echoes answer,
"Time to say good-bye!"

From the swaying branches,
Leaves of gold and brown
Dancing in the sunlight
Flutter softly down.
Empty nests are swinging
In the tree-tops high,
All the birds are calling,
"Time to say good-bye!"





CHAPTER IV.

THANKSGIVING PLANS.

THE "Smith family" were getting ready for Thanksgiving. They were very interesting persons indeed; so the younger children thought, and if the truth were told, the older ones also found them alluring. They lived in a farm-house on the sand-table. This latter article the boys had made by nailing upright pieces of board around the sides of an old kitchen table, and then filling the enclosure with sand. The house was a wooden box. The little ones had painted and furnished it for "busy work," and were exceedingly proud of their own dainty handiwork. Around the house were neat fences made of colored sticks, enclosing the fields, orchards and garden, while twigs did duty for trees.

The "family" consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, their children, Johnny, Bessie and baby Nell, and the big dog, Rover. To be sure, all its members were almost the same size, as they were in reality the tiniest jointed dolls, and Rover was of gigantic stature compared with his master; but then, as Miss Mitchell said, these disadvantages only added to the fun of "making believe."

Evelyn had made the clothes, and each doll possessed two suits,—real working clothes for every day and a "best set" for extra occasions. The adventures of these small people made charming reading lessons. Harold, Dorothy and the other beginners did not realize how many new words they were learning, so absorbed were they in the fortunes of Bessie, John and the dear little baby. Miss Mitchell contrived so many funny, merry little stories! The ten-year-olds begged to have their language lessons from the same fertile subject, even big Jack sometimes smiled over some incident in the sand-board drama, while more than once the good or bad conduct of the imaginary children taught its quiet lesson to the quick hearts that listened.

During November interest rose to a climax, for then all the scenes of harvest were enacted. A long crinkled strip of gray tissue paper represented a stream.

Over it were constructed a paste-board bridge and mill. Wheat was cut and garnered in the tiny fields, threshed in the barn, and taken to the mill from which it returned as flour in fat white bags. The tiniest red balls, meant for apples, were gathered from the orchard and stored away in the barn which already held quantities of dried grass for hay. While the farmer and his son worked outside, preparing for the long winter, the mother and Bessie were busy in the house, and so naturally yet unconsciously was the deepest thought of the season brought out, that Miss Mitchell was surprised one morning before school, to see Josie Carstens put the "play" baby in its mother's arms, while she said, tenderly,

"Oh! you darling! mother's got so much to be thankful for! It's been such a good year for father, and you children are *so* good and helpful. We'll certainly have to go to church on Thanksgiving Day."

Jean acted upon the hint. A little church appeared at the top of the sand-hill, and with quiet reverence she told them of the grateful hearts all over the land that would gather on Thanksgiving Day to praise the great Father for His goodness.

"There is one week left before vacation," she said. "And I think we will spend a short time each morning

in talking about the first Thanksgiving Day that was ever kept in our country."

The sand-table was transformed for the purpose. One corner represented Holland, strips of tin were laid down for canals, while small windmills and peaked houses of cardboard made the scene very realistic.



Another corner served as England, and the children took great delight in cutting and coloring sombre pasteboard Puritans. Joe made two models of ships, one the *Speedwell*, the other the *Mayflower*. The little company of men, women and children started on their voyage across the blue ocean, upon whose crinkled blue surface the waves rolled naturally. It was more exciting than any romance, and all the listeners' hearts were troubled when the *Speedwell* sprung a leak, then rejoiced when the fresh start was made in the staunch *Mayflower*.



Those two dear little historic babies, *Peregrine* and *Oceanus*;—there was not a child in the school from big Jack to wee Dorothy who had not a tender feeling for them. Miss Mitchell knew how to tell a story. The interest of her audience grew and deepened with the

vivid narrative. When the long voyage ended at last and the settlement was being made at Plymouth, what joy and excitement! what fun to cut down the pigmy trees and build the log-houses with oiled paper for windows, and to put up the fort and the church! How the boys reveled in the bravery of Miles Standish and his companions, while the girls exulted in the fact that the women were no whit behind the men in courage! and then the exciting moment when the first Indian was seen! How the children laughed over the story of Samoset and his visit, sighed over the Pilgrims' hardships and dangers, and then triumphed with them in the joy and gratitude of that first Thanksgiving Day!

It was all real to Miss Mitchell, and she took her eager listeners with her until their hearts glowed with admiration for the self-denial and tenderness which had beautified those sturdy characters.

Mr. Martin paid a visit of inspection to the school that week, as it happened, arriving just in time to hear the end of one of the stories. The room was absolutely quiet save for the speaker's earnest voice, for the boys and girls were listening breathlessly. No one noticed him enter, except Joe, who held up a warning finger. The farmer waited with interest until she had finished, his shrewd eyes taking in the whole scene.

"Good mornin', Miss Mitchell," he said at last.

Jean turned with a smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Martin. I didn't see you come in."

"I'm a-visitin' the school as *trustee*," he announced, evidently thinking that this character called for an unwonted show of dignity. "What lesson be ye hearin'?"

"Well!" Jean laughed. "It's a mixture, I think. History, language and reading all blended together."

"I ruther calc'lated it was hist'ry," with some pride. He meditated a moment, then inquired in a loud and anxious whisper, perfectly audible to the entire school, "Was'nt ye—wasn't ye makin' a *story* out o' it?"

"I was trying to," Jean answered frankly.

"Well! Well! Ye don't teach it much like I was taught. I remember learnin' it well enough, for I was allers good at dates. 'The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock on the shores o' Massychusetts in the year 1620.' That's about all I ever knowed about it. But ye made it right into a story, an' put *folks* in it!"

Jean laughed. "They were pretty lively persons, too, don't you think so? It must have taken a large amount of grit and resolution to carry out their plans."

"Hum! Hum! Maybe so. What ye goin' to do now?"

"It's time for the little ones to read. While they are reciting, the pupils in the seventh and eighth grades may imagine they lived in that far-off time and write what they thought and did. Each one may take any character he wishes, and when the reading class is over we'll try to guess who you are by your description of yourselves. The fourth, fifth and sixth grades may draw the Mayflower or any Puritan picture they choose, and the second and third grades may make a list of all the things they can think of that the Pilgrims may have used. And the first grade will please look this way."

Ten pairs of shining eyes began to dance with anticipation. Turning to the board she drew a hasty sketch of a quaint child-face and wrote beneath it,

"This is a little Puritan girl."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Mr. Martin, in amazement. "Dor'thy's in that class, an' Dick an' Prissy. They don't know their letters yit, let alone readin' such long words."

"I think they know these. Who wants to read the story?"

Ten hands waved wildly in the air.

"Prissy may try."

Deeply impressed by the presence of "company,"

Prissy rose and in dignified tones declared, "This is a little Puritan girl."

"She came over the great ocean in the Mayflower," wrote Miss Mitchell quickly. "Dorothy."

"She tame over the dreat otun in the Mayflower."

"Once more, dear. Very plainly, please."

Dorothy smiled. "I tan say it plain, Mif Mitchell. She came over the dra—great ocean in the *Mayflower!*"

"Well! Well! That beats all," and the farmer listened in wonder as the story progressed, and each child rose and read with evident understanding and clear expression. "Why, it tuk me about as long as this to learn my letters, an' I wasn't so dretful dumb, nuther. An' here these babies kin *read!*"

"They have been taught principally by phonics," Miss Mitchell explained. "There are some sight-words in the lesson, but very few, and they have been drilled on them several times."

The trustee was plainly mystified.

"I guess there's more to the teachin' business than there used to be. I ain't kept up much with the new-fangled idees, for I don't git much time. But you're right up to date, ain't ye?"

Miss Mitchell was much amused by this naïve com-

pliment, and Mr. Martin's unusual stiffness relaxed visibly in the genial atmosphere. When the whole school listened while the higher grades read their little character sketches, he covered himself with glory by guessing at once that Joe was Miles Standish. This success so elated him that he tip-toed back into the room after he had said good-bye, and confided to Jean in a stage whisper,

"I'm right down pleased, teacher. An' I want to tell ye that I've learnt more about them old fellows than I ever knowed afore. Why, I declare, they seem jest like kind o' *friends!*"

"We intend to have a few exercises for Thanksgiving to-morrow afternoon, and would be glad to have you come, if you can," Miss Mitchell said pleasantly.

"I'll try, teacher. I'll try my best to git here," and then with many sly nods and winks at Joe, the farmer finally departed.

"Can *our* fathers and mothers come, too, if they want to?" Tom asked.

The teacher hesitated.

"We shall have nothing at all elaborate," she said at last. "But I think they might enjoy the exercises. Yes, if you wish to invite them you may."

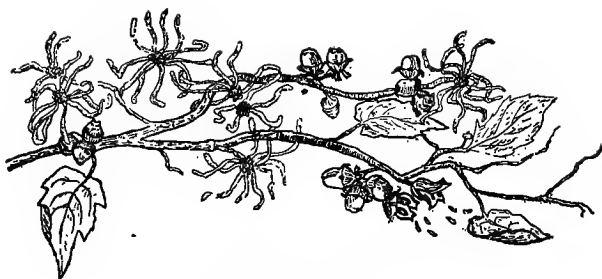
The noon hour passed quickly and pleasantly in

planning for the next day, for Miss Mitchell believed that half the pleasure consisted in getting ready. Among them they planned a really enjoyable program, and then she suggested that they should all go down into the woods after school and gather dogwood and bittersweet berries for decoration.

"I think it would be pretty and appropriate to have the platform arranged in keeping with the Thanksgiving thought. If we could borrow a few pieces of old-fashioned furniture they would look nice;—a spinning wheel, or an old cradle, for instance."

"We've got a spinning wheel," said Joe. "You can use that."

"And I can bring lots of old, old things!" Tom exclaimed enthusiastically. "My mother's got a chair that's just the picture o' the one in your book. She used to keep it up in the garret till we begun to learn about the Puritans. I've coaxed her to bring it down an' set it in the parlor. An' she's got lots of queer old blue plates. We can stand 'em up on the shelf there, like they used to in those old times. My, but it's goin' to be fine to-morrow. We ain't had any company before for *years an' years!*"



CHAPTER V.

JOE.

I'M SORRY, Joe, but I cannot accept this work. You will have to write it again. Please be a little more careful this time." Miss Mitchell spoke a trifle wearily. She could see, without glancing up, the laughing black eyes of the boy before her. It seemed as if some perverse imp had taken possession of him ever since the beginning of the afternoon session, inciting him to all kinds of odd little acts, each small in itself, but extremely annoying to a teacher when performed before an appreciative audience of fun-loving pupils. Some of his restlessness had already infected the others. Miss Mitchell wondered if the prospect of the next day's entertainment had been too dazzling. She found it hard

to be patient, but had succeeded, realizing that the lad was not annoying her intentionally. More than once she had nipped some specially promising enterprise in the bud, so quietly that he did not suspect her of having done so. More than once, too, she had given him something to do which had engrossed his thoughts to the exclusion of his mischievous plans. She could not give her entire attention to him, however, when forty-five others were waiting. Now when the session was half over she felt tired and discouraged as she handed him the book with a little sigh which she was careful he should not hear. But she was not prepared for the effect of her words. An angry light came into the boy's countenance.

"*Why* must I write it again?" he demanded.

"Because I wish it," was the instant answer.

The little sentence was like fire to powder. Joe's hot temper flamed beyond his control.

"I *never* will!" he cried in passionate tones. Seizing the unoffending algebra he hurled it across the room until it struck the opposite wall with so great a force that its pages and papers fluttered wildly over the floor and desks.

There was a moment of intense silence. Everyone gazed spell-bound at the two central figures in the

scene;—Joe, on whose brow the veins stood out thick and purple from his sudden wrath, and the startled girl who confronted him, pale but resolute.

For an instant the spirit of her soldier father flashed like steel in the brown eyes. The next, the watchers saw the fire fade while a great compassion took its place. The lad gazed at her in amazement. No one in the room realized that behind the firmness the girl's frightened heart was crying, "Dear God, I don't know what to do. Help me."

"Pick the book up, Joe," she said gently.

The boy hesitated, laughed uneasily and obeyed.

"You may write the lesson now."

Without a word he went to his seat and began the work. The tension was relaxed. Miss Mitchell called the geography class and recitations went on as usual. Glancing now and then at Joe she saw the dark head bent low over the task. Evidently he was taking unusual care.

The "A" class recitation in literature came the last period in the afternoon. The class was reading "Evangeline," and the exquisite story had charmed each reader. It was Joe's favorite study, and he brought his work up to the desk just in time to be ready. Somewhat to Miss Mitchell's surprise, the last

shadow had gone from his brow and his handsome face looked as smiling as usual as he handed her the paper, which was beautifully written, with his full name, Joseph Nason Martin, at the top. Not a trace of the vanished temper remained.

Miss Mitchell had some old-fashioned ideas, if she was an "up-to-date" teacher. It actually seemed to her that the school-room was not a place in which a person should vent his rage. Moreover, when she saw the faces of the little children still pale and nervous from fright, and then reflected that the exhibition of perfectly ungoverned temper must have been given many times before her arrival, she found it difficult to act as unconcerned as Joe did. His recitation was excellent. Without the slightest shadow of self-consciousness, he asked and answered questions as freely as the others. Miss Mitchell, guiding in her usual vivid, entertaining way, felt a sub-stratum of troubled thought.

Should she, or should she not, help the boy to remember his fault? It was evident that he and the others considered the incident as ended. It had made little or no impression on his mind. "Only another of Joe's explosions," was plainly the way in which his mates regarded it.

If she took the easier course and made no further reference to it, what would be the result? Probably the next time his anger rose there would be another outburst, attended perhaps by serious consequences.

On the other hand, if she tried to impress his misconduct upon him, she might lose the liking which she knew he felt for her. She had already had sufficient proof that that liking was not strong enough to make him control his passion, yet her heart went out toward the tall, straight young fellow talking with so much animation and energy, so thoroughly tingling with magnificent health and vitality.

When school was out the pupils waited for her. Joe was the foremost spirit. As she heard him carelessly laughing and joking, a foreboding of the future which might be his if he were never taught self-control, came to her and darkened her sunny face.

When she was ready, the children ran ahead. Joe, who was monitor for the week, lingered to lock the door. Miss Mitchell waited a moment, too.

"I will fasten it this time," she said. "You may go home, Joe."

"Oh! I'm not going home," was the gay answer. "I'll help you get the berries."

"Not this afternoon," she answered gravely. Some-

thing in the tones pierced to the lad's consciousness. He wriggled as their meaning came home to him.

"I want to go with the others, Miss Mitchell."

"Not now, Joe. I'd rather you didn't."

Flushing a little he looked down at the withered leaves.

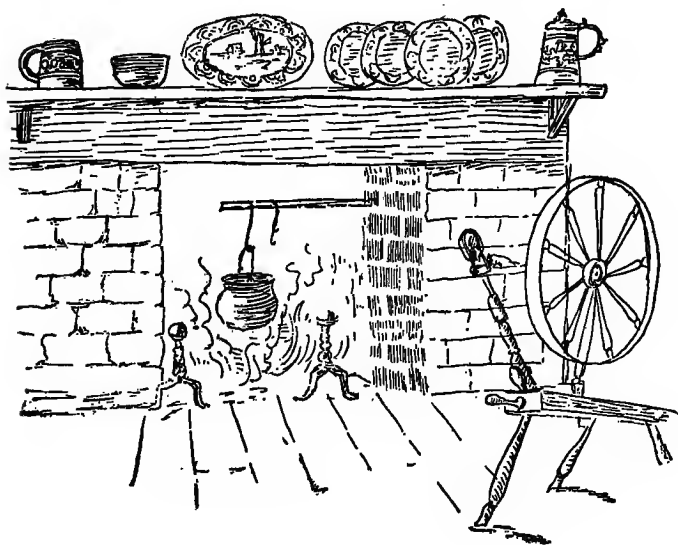
"I'm good—now," he said at last, in the winning, coaxing way which had never before failed, by its very audacity, to bring a smile to the sternest lips. But Miss Mitchell did not smile. She looked straight into the handsome face which slowly crimsoned beneath the surprise and disapproval it read in her own.

"You *cannot* go, to-day," she said, quietly, and turned away, leaving Joe scarlet and ashamed for the first time in his life.

There was a slight snowstorm that night. The next morning when the children came to school the fields and woods were covered with a shining white carpet. Jack and Joe arrived together, carrying the heavy spinning-wheel between them. Tom struggled valiantly under the weight of the big chair he had promised, while his smaller brothers and sisters carried the precious blue plates and a pair of ancient andirons. Almost every child had brought some small article.

Joe was a little quiet at first. He was somewhat afraid Miss Mitchell would refer to the previous afternoon, but she was as gay and pleasant as ever, and gradually he forgot his diffidence and joined with the others in their merry plans.

The room looked charming when it was trimmed, for scarlet berries added brightness, and a few late blossoms of witch-hazel gave a hint of sunshine though the skies were gray. The platform represented an old-fashioned kitchen, with the andirons standing primly



in front of the fire-place. Joe had constructed this latter masterpiece of genius, and bore his honors meekly. The spinning-wheel stood near the middle of the scene, and wee Dorothy, seated in the big chair in snowy cap and kerchief, made the sweetest Puritan maid imaginable.

Promptly at half-past one the visitors arrived. There were just four of them, stout Mrs. Wall, Mrs. West, Mrs. Messler, and Joe's mother, a sweet-faced little woman who explained that Mr. Martin had been called away on business at the last moment. They were greeted with great ceremony by the committee on welcome, who conducted them to places of honor in the front of the room. It was funny to watch Freddy Wall's pride as he surveyed his parent, his fat little German face radiating the utmost satisfaction while he fastened his unwinking gaze upon her beaming countenance.

Joe was evidently uneasy. Watching his opportunity, he went to Miss Mitchell's side and whispered softly, "I *wish* you wouldn't tell my mother about yesterday." He looked so anxious that Jean hastened to reassure him. "I never thought of doing it, Joe."

The guests settled themselves for an afternoon of pleasure. Mrs. Wall's broad features widened still

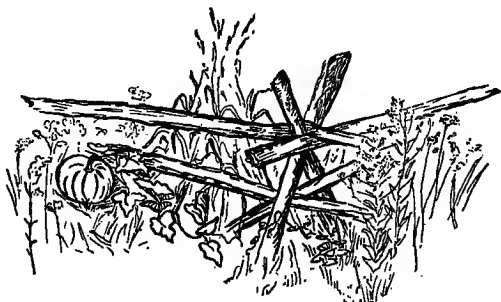
more in an expansive grin. Gentle Mrs. Martin's tired face grew rested, and the two other mothers exchanged confidences in interested asides.

"That's my great-great-grandfather's chair," Mrs. Messler assured her companion. "Nothin' would do Tom but what I must put it in the front room at home. 'It's a Pur'tan chair,' sez he. 'No,' sez I, 'tain't nothin' but old mahogany, an' weak in its j'int's at that.' But Pur'tan chair it was an' Pur'tan chair it had to be, though I feel ashamed ev'ry time I see it alongside o' the red plush set in the parlor."

The afternoon proved very enjoyable. There was plenty of spirited music. The older ones told a continued story of early colonial days, each taking up the narrative where another left off, until the last one had spoken, when Miss Mitchell deftly wove the threads together and brought the story to a charming close by adding a "genuine Thanksgiving flavor," as Evelyn said. There were concert recitations of appropriate poems by the different classes, and dainty motion-songs and finger-plays by the little ones, all in direct harmony with the thought of the month.

The black-board calendar received its share of notice. A stack of corn stood tall and straight among the withered weeds and around it lay a big golden

pumpkin and some shining red apples. Beneath was written :



THANKSGIVING DAY.

The goldenrod candles are all burned out
By the zigzag fence of gray,
The asters have turned to withered seeds
That the wind will carry away,
But here's a cheer for the waning year
And the glad Thanksgiving Day!

The thrushes have flown from the treetops high,
And the bluebirds could not stay,
And lone and hushed are the empty nests;
But the children smile as they say,
"When frost is chill on the misty hill
Comes the glad Thanksgiving day."

They know that the harvest is garnered in,
In its ripe and golden store,
And patient and still the brown earth waits
For the time of its toil is o'er :
It waits the snow that shall fold it low
Till it wake from sleep once more.

The daisies will whiten the fields again
* And the robins build, next May;
So gratefully sing, little children, sing,
Till the air with mirth is gay!
A song for the cheer of the happy year
And the glad Thanksgiving Day!

Miss Mitchell had sat up late the night before preparing tiny souvenirs for the occasion. These were book-marks made from the corners of thick white envelopes, with scalloped edges. Each one had a pretty sketch of a Puritan boy or girl drawn in delicate coloring. It had taken considerable time to make them, but she did not regret it when she saw the pleasure they gave the children.

After the pupils and the other parents had gone, Mrs. Martin lingered.

"I want to speak to you about Joe," she said timidly. "We've spoiled him, pa an' I, but I guess you've

found that out already. You see, he's all we have. There were five at first, four boys and one girl, but God called them all home ahead of us;—exceptin' Joe. They went one after the other, within six weeks, from scarlet fever. Joe had it, too. He wasn't much more'n a baby, an' we thought he wouldn't be spared, either. Oh! you can't think how diff'rent things seemed. The house was so still, Miss Mitchell. No little feet pattering in an' out; no little voices callin' after us! An' then, when the doctor said that the baby would live after all, it seemed as if we couldn't do enough for him. Just that one little fellow in the big lonely house where all the others had laughed an' played"——

The gentle voice faltered. Jean was crying softly.

"Well! I can't bear to think of it sometimes, an' then other times I like to remember how gay and bright it used to be, an' how proud pa an' I were of little Ruth an' the boys. I know we'd ought to have done diff'rent with Joe lots of times. Often when he was small we'd resolve to be stricter with him. But it wasn't any use. We'd think about the others, an' then——. Do you like the boy, Miss Mitchell?"

"Very much."

"I thought you must. Everybody does. He's got a nice way with him, hasn't he? An' he's so good an'

kind to me. He likes you, too. Something went wrong at school yesterday. I knowed it the minute he came home, an' he was as quiet an' sober as could be all the evening, never laughin' an' jokin' as he generally does. I tried to coax him to tell me about it, but he didn't want to talk. It wouldn't do any good for *you* to tell me, would it?"

"No."

"That's all I wanted to know. I'm sure you'll help him all you can. An' you'll forgive me for botherin' you with all this long story?"

Jean put her arms around her and kissed her tenderly.

"I'm so sorry for you," she said sweetly. "Forgive you? I *thank* you, instead, for trusting me. Joe is a dear, dear boy. I *had* to punish him yesterday, but I like and respect him for his own sake, and his mother's, too."

She sent the little woman away happy, then began to get ready herself. Suddenly she started with fright. The door was slowly opening.

"Miss Mitchell," a voice said hesitatingly.

"Oh! Joe, it's you," in relieved tones.

The boy came in with shy irresolution.

"Are you—are you mad at me?" he asked, wistfully.

"Why! no, you funny boy."

"I'm sorry about yesterday. When I get mad I just let myself go.* Seems as if I can't help it."

"*Can't* you?"

"Well, I s'pose I could if I tried hard enough. I'll try next time. What do you think of my mother, Miss Mitchell?"

Jean waited a moment: Then she said with heartfelt conviction:

"Think of her, Joe Martin? Why, I think you have the sweetest little mother, in the world,—next to my own."

Joe was intensely pleased. He was his old gay-hearted self once more as he walked home with her, and after he had said "good-bye," Jean heard him far down the road singing in jolly but not very musical tones snatches from the November song they had sung in school.

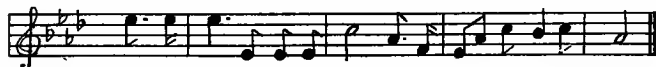
READY FOR REST.



In the woods so still and deep, little wild things go to sleep.



Graceful fern and nodding flower, well you love the bedtime hour.



Though the sun is shining bright, you are sleepy, dears, good night.

Slender vines that flamed and burned,

Leaves, that gold and scarlet turned,

Tiny mosses, shy and sweet,

Yellow grasses at our feet,

Safely hiding now from sight;

Little sleepy things, good night!

Frosty winds around us fly;

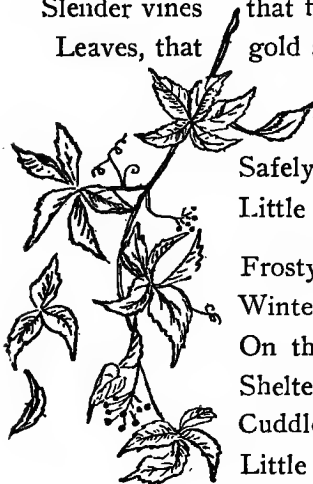
Winter days are drawing nigh.

On the old earth's bosom warm

Sheltered safe from every storm,

Cuddle close while snows are white!

Little sleepy things, good night!





CHAPTER VI.

A MISUNDERSTANDING.



THINK—yes, I really think we ought to have a Christmas tree.”

“Oh! Oh!”

“Where? Here at school?”

“Goody! Goody! Isn’t that splendid?”

The Thanksgiving vacation was over and they had all crowded around Miss Mitchell to tell her of the good times they had had, and to assure her of their gladness that school had reopened. She waved them back laughingly.

“Give me a little room to breathe in, please. Yes, I think we must have a tree. It will be nice for your parents. They haven’t had one since they were children.”

"Oh! You were only joking!"

"Not a bit of it. I'm in earnest. You've had plenty of them yourselves. I think it would be a good plan to return the compliment and please *them*. We'll make all the things ourselves. Cornucopias, stars and shining paper ornaments will trim the tree very nicely, and as for presents, I can show you how to make a good many simple but pretty gifts. The nicest presents of all will be booklets of your neatest work. We'll make dainty covers for them and each one may put his examples, compositions, drawing, etc., inside. You will like to look at them yourselves, as time passes. Just think, Harold, perhaps years and years from now, when you're a man, you may come across yours, and then you'll laugh and say, 'Why, I made this for my mother the very first year I went to school!' Wouldn't that be funny?"

"Tan I mate somefin for the tree, too?" asked Dorothy, anxiously.

"Oh! yes, sweetheart," and Miss Mitchell kissed the tiny pucker from the white forehead.

Evelyn watched the graceful little action curiously. She was one of the big girls. Miss Mitchell had never seen her smile. The little ones adored her, and she did many things to give them pleasure, but she took

no interest in the gay chatter of the older pupils; and indeed, seemed to hear little of it. She had a strong, sad face. It had half-repelled her teacher at first, for it seemed unnatural that a child of thirteen should be so gloomy, but "Granny" Wilson had explained the cause.

"Evelyn Schuyler goin' to school?" she had asked one afternoon, and when Jean answered in the affirmative, had said with much compassion:

"Poor little creetur! I'm as sorry as kin be for her. She's got a hard row to hoe."

"Why?"

"Ain't you never heerd about it? Her mother ain't right in her mind. She was sick for a long time an' then her baby died suddent, an' she lost her reason. Ev'lyn's a queer girl. She don't say much, but she misses her mother dretful. Mis' Schuyler's to Knowlton now, to the 'sylum there. Some folks says she may git better, but most people think there ain't much chance of it."

"Oh! how sad! I don't wonder the poor child looks gloomy," Jean had exclaimed with the deepest pity. "I'll try to make things as bright as I can for her. Nobody can help her much, I'm afraid."

She had done her utmost to win the child's love and

bring as much sunshine as possible into her life, but could not be sure how far she had succeeded. Evelyn seemed to think that all manifestations of affection indicated weakness. Although uniformly kind to the smaller children, she never, even to them, exhibited any outward sign of tenderness.

While the others gayly planned what they would do, Evelyn sat silent, looking so sober that Jean's kind heart quivered with sympathy. As days passed, however, the girl became really interested in the book she was making.

"It's for my father," she said, when Miss Mitchell complimented her on the neatness of her work. Her lips trembled as she spoke, and Jean longed to show her compassion, but fearing to probe the wound too deeply, could say only:

"I'm sure he will like it and be glad you remembered him."

December was a royal month. The days seemed to fly past, for there was so much to do. The children fairly reveled in the Christmas spirit. Miss Mitchell let them have all the enjoyment possible. Of course several little ones believed implicitly in the Santa Claus myth. Jean saw no harm in it. Looking back over her own childhood she recalled the pleasure it

had given her to lie awake at night listening for the tinkling bells and the pattering of reindeer hoofs across the snow. Indeed she had so far kept the eager child-heart that she could still find delight in the thought. Realizing that Santa Claus is, after all, only the embodiment of the idea of giving, she "conjured" up so wonderful and interesting a personage that her listeners held their breath in delighted wonder.

"We're all Santa Clauses, too," she said, with a merry twinkle in her eye. "Dorothy, Freddy, and all the rest of us, for we're making gifts for the friends we love."

Starting with that thought she led them up to the highest, sweetest meaning of the Christmas-tide. Step by step, not too fast, lest the little ones might lose the meaning, her stories grew in beauty and sank deep into the hearers' hearts. There was never any moral to them;—that is, it was never pointed out.

The story of the tiny evergreen doing its best to grow straight and tall in the forest—just *growing*, that was all, but finding itself chosen at last to be the beautiful Christmas tree. Surely there was no sermon there, and yet careless Jake tried harder that day than he had ever before dreamed of doing.

Celia Thaxter's story of quaint little Piccola and

the swallow she found in her wooden shoe! what could be more interesting? Yet Mattie, who had been inclined to be discontented over the prospect of her humble gifts, felt ashamed of her dissatisfaction when Piccola had been so sweet and happy over the little bird that had been her only present.

Then the story of the Christmas chimes that rang their sweetest for the child who had been brave and true all the year. Was it fancy, or did Harry really have a wistful expression as he listened?

There was but one cloud to dim the sunshine of Miss Mitchell's happiness. Something was the matter with Jack. He was a quiet, reserved boy with none of Joe's ceaseless chatter or exhaustless supply of high spirits, but whose influence over the others was fully as marked. When he chose, which was seldom, he would cast off his reticence and amuse his schoolmates by a hilarity which was the more striking because of its difference from his usual mood. He had a wonderful talent for mimicry. Jean had heard him imitate half a dozen persons, one after the other, with a fidelity to life that was really startling.

He was a far better reader than any of the other pupils, as he was a natural orator of no slight ability, but it was evident that he had been almost entirely

neglected. Most of his teachers had feared the sharpness of his ridicule, while those who had not cared for that had been repelled by an air of sullen obstinacy which clung to him unconsciously.

Jean read him more clearly. She perceived that what seemed like obstinacy was really the unyielding decision of a nature accustomed to stand alone, while the sarcasm, which was his only weapon, was used only under strong provocation. Believing that the boy was capable of great power for good, she had exerted all her influence to help him, with the result that he was beginning to lose the old rough manners which had enveloped him like a crust, and to give deference to her quiet suggestions.

But all at once, without the slightest warning, that state of things ended. Jack came to school as usual, but sat silent and gloomy after his lessons were learned. The light had faded from his face and Miss Mitchell looked in vain for any sign of the interest he had begun to manifest. At recess the other boys tried to persuade him to join in their games, but were refused so decidedly that they did not repeat the attempt.

"Surly fellow!" Joe said in disgust. "He's back in his old ways. Come on, boys, let him alone. He's got a bee in his bonnet, and there's no use coaxing him."

"No, there isn't," was the dogged answer. "Keep away from me. Nobody wants your coaxing."

The boys soon took him at his word and left him to his own devices. Before a week passed he was apparently the same taciturn stubborn lad that he had always been. Miss Mitchell was in despair. It was all in vain that she spoke kindly to him, singling him out for the little services he had seemed to like rendering. She noticed, too, that he ~~avoided~~ her whenever possible. In ~~the morning~~ he came in just before the bell rang, hurried away the moment school was out, and at recess held himself steadily aloof from the group which always surrounded her.

Much puzzled and disappointed, she tried hard to regain his interest. One morning when she had told Van Dyck's story of "The Other Wise Man," so simply that its exquisite beauty was plain, even to the youngest children, she looked straight into Jack's face and found his gaze fastened on her with such sorrow and yearning that she felt strangely moved.

Yielding to a sudden impulse, she said, "Jack, may I ask you to help me a little with the board work this afternoon?"

The boy deliberated a moment. "I wish—you'd excuse me," he said very slowly.

Miss Mitchell flushed. It was the first time in her life that she had been so decidedly repulsed, but she answered as pleasantly as ever,

"Certainly, Jack. Perhaps Tom has more time just now."

"I'll be glad to help," Tom answered promptly, flashing a side glance of contempt at Jack, whose face was bent low over his book.

The afternoon passed quickly, and the children, dismissed a trifle earlier than usual, as a heavy storm was threatening, ran merrily homeward. Jack walked alone, as he often did. Gradually he was left behind and after waiting until they were out of sight, turned suddenly and retraced his steps towards the school-house.

The door stood open. He heard snatches of Tom's gay conversation and now and then a few words from the low, pleasant voice he knew so well. He had not been missed. Miss Mitchell had not cared for his refusal to help her, though it had been hard for him to speak it.

He felt deserted and forlorn. A year before the other boys would have followed his lead; he could have made the teacher's life most unpleasant for her, had he chosen, but now they had all given entire alle-

giance to the new star. All but himself, he said, bitterly, yet was conscious the next moment that he would not injure her in any way even if he possessed the power.

Going deep into the woods, where there was no danger of being discovered, the lad threw himself on his face among the damp, withered leaves of the sweet-fern and cried as if his heart were broken.

Meanwhile Miss Mitchell and Tom were having a pleasant time, for she was far too sensible to let the boy suspect that Jack's slow words were still ringing in her ears. She laughed and chatted, making the slight task so agreeable that Tom went home with a light step and the conviction that Jack had been exceedingly stupid as well as rude in refusing.

Miss Mitchell lingered only a few minutes after he had gone, then decided after a glance at the gray sky that the storm would not break before nightfall, and she would get some pine cones for the next day's nature lesson. She had followed for some distance the damp pathway leading through the woods, when she was startled by the sound of sobs and recognized Jack lying prostrate among the faded leaves.

For an instant she stood undecided. The boy had not heard her approach. It was not safe to leave him

there on the wet ground, so, although she feared a second repulse, she bent over him, saying :

"Jack, I'm afraid you will be sick if you stay here. Are you in trouble, my boy?"

The lad started at the words and sat up at once, his face crimsoning with shame and surprise. Miss Mitchell laid her hand gently on his shoulder, but to her surprise, he shook it off as if it had stung him.

"Why, Jack!" she cried, grieved and amazed. "Are you really angry with me? I thought—I almost thought you had begun to like me a little."

The boy buried his face in the yellow leaves and sobbed aloud.

"I did," he faltered at last, unable to keep his misery to himself any longer. "I did care for you. I thought you were—different. An' I tried hard to please you. But 'tisn't any use. Everybody's just alike!"

Never had Miss Mitchell felt more bewildered. She saw clearly that in some unconscious way she had wounded the boy's feelings, but had not the slightest clue to the mystery.

"Tell me about it, Jack. Have I hurt you in any way? I never meant to. I am sorry."

There was no answer. A few drops of rain were

already falling from the leaden skies. The woods looked dark and dreary. Her heart ached with sympathy for the lad, but she dared not let him lie there any longer. When she spoke again it was in a different manner.

"Jack," she said, in the tones a few boys had reason to remember and respect. "You *must* get up at once. I mean you to obey me."

He would have defied her had he dared, but something warned him not to do so. Scrambling to his feet he tried to hurry away, but Miss Mitchell detained him.

"Wait!" she said, still sternly. "I don't know what you mean. You are making a great mistake, and I insist on your telling me about it." Then at the sight of the misery on the boyish face, she added:

"I am your friend, Jack. Don't you know it? You're not afraid of me, are you? Let me help you. I'm sure I can."

Neither was conscious that the storm had commenced in earnest. Jean understood that the trouble, whatever it was, was a very real one to the boy and that he was in the deepest earnest. This was not hasty Joe, whose quick, impatient words meant very little, who could be angry one moment and good-natured the

next. This lad was slow of speech, tenacious of his opinion and difficult to influence. Most persons considered him hard-hearted, but she judged him more truly. She knew that warm feelings lay beneath the grim exterior, but even she was surprised at the wild outburst that followed her words.

"No; you're not my friend! Nobody is! If you were you'd never have said things about my father. He never did anything against you. It doesn't hurt you if he does—if he does drink sometimes. But you mocked him an' mocked him. I'll never forget it,—never!"

Jean stood perfectly still. He had given her the key at last. She knew what he meant, and realized dimly some part of the agony he had suffered in silence. The class in physiology had had a lesson on alcohol a few days before. They had taken little interest in it at first, for the subject was one which did not appeal to them, but suddenly as she had looked at their bright young faces a new sense of the value of sobriety had come to her, and she had spoken out all her hatred of drunkenness.

Never once had she suspected that the vice touched their lives in any way. Surely the boys and girls in that quiet country place could have seen none of its evils.

What she dreaded for them was the time when they would be men and women going out into the world to meet temptation. She had brought before them a word-picture of a drunkard she had once seen, speaking so earnestly and vividly that she had read answering disgust and resolution in their flashing eyes. The boy beside her went on passionately :

"He gits knocked an' cuffed around like a dog. He's all you said an' more, too. Nobody cares anything for him. Nobody wants him 'round. I know he's old an' poor an' f'rlorn, but he's *my* father, an' I'll stand by him. I'm not goin' back on him nohow. He's always been good to me. An' I wouldn't care if anybody else had said things. The boys do, sometimes, an' I don't mind 'em. But *you*—oh! I *did* like you."

Miss Mitchell had tears in her own bright eyes.

"Why! Jack, *dear* Jack," she cried. "You didn't think I could be so mean—so cruel as that? I never knew about your father, not until this minute. You believe me, don't you? You poor boy! Oh! I *wish* you would forgive me!"

The boy stared at her, mingled doubt, relief and wonder striving for the mastery in his expression.

"You didn't know anything about him? It wasn't him you saw?"

"Jack! who *could* be so heartless? Oh! I'm so sorry that I hurt you. I'd like to be your friend as well as your teacher. Will you let me? Shall we shake hands to show that we really mean it?"

Jack stood in awkward silence. No one had ever hinted at friendship for him before. To most of the villagers he was only "old Billy White's son." Mothers tolerated his companionship with their boys when unavoidable, but looked askance at any intimacy with him. The influence he had won at school seemed worthless to him at times, when he contrasted it with the spontaneous admiration given to Joe. Now, with that kind gaze upon him, he felt a strange new sense of respect for himself. Then he clasped the soft hand clumsily in his hard brown palm. He had no words to express his love and gratitude, but his whole heart looked out from his honest eyes and Jean knew that she had won a friend whose loyalty would never falter.



CHAPTER VII.

GETTING READY.

PREPARATIONS for Christmas went on steadily. The children tried their best with each day's written work that it might be considered worthy a place in their books. Many of the talks during the month were about shepherds and their work, a subject which proved of unfailing interest, while the Christmas customs of other lands opened up new fields of thought.

"Why can't we have a tree for the birds?" Carl asked after he had heard the story of the bunch of

wheat or oats which Norwegian Christine prepares for them at that season each year.

"We can," Miss Mitchell said. So an evergreen in plain view of the school-room windows was chosen and to its branches the children tied tiny sheaves of oats and wheat, sprigs of the partridge plant with its scarlet berries, a few small ears of corn and little baskets full of bread crumbs. At first the birds shyly held aloof from this tempting array, evidently suspecting treason of some sort, but after a day or two they lost their fear and each morning to the pupils' delight the tree would hold a happy company of visitors, chirping and piping to each other. Sparrows, snow-birds, finches, robins and cat-birds were the principal visitors, but once in a while a bluebird made a fleeting visit, and one morning Freddy shrieked with glee, for there on the highest bough, as unconcernedly as if he were at home, a bright-eyed squirrel was nibbling one of the ears of corn.

The children took so much interest in their bird guests and so much pleasure in the nature, reading and language lessons which they provided, that Miss Mitchell told them the story of "The Birds' Christmas Carol," by Kate Douglas Wiggin, saying that she would introduce them to another family of Birds,

without feathers. How they laughed and cried over its fun and pathos! The delightfully funny "Ruggleses" drew a smile from Evelyn herself, and there were few dry eyes in the room as Jean told how little Carol "fell asleep" listening to the music of the choir-boys.

"You're a-takin' too much trouble for them children," Granny Wilson said. "Here 'tis more 'n two weeks afore Christmas an' I wouldn't be s'prised if they dreamed of it nights already."

"So do I," said Jean, gayly, and then she sighed a little, for her Christmas would not seem the same so far away from Ruth and mother.

Granny's keen ears heard the sigh. She had her own little surprise for the girl, of whom she had grown very fond. Mrs. Martin and she had consulted together; and as a result of their planning Jean's mother and sister were to come to Morrisville for the Christmas exercises and the holiday week. They had written to Mrs. Mitchell's physician, who declared that the change might do the delicate woman much good. Jean had not the faintest suspicion of the kind thought, but she brightened up at once as Granny said:

"Got your home presents all finished yet?"

"Yes, they're all done," and Jean ran to get them

that they might admire them together for the hundredth time.

"Better pack them to-night," Granny suggested. "It might take some time for them to get to Newton, for the express offices are crowded now. I'll see about sending them to-morrow."

So Jean spent the evening happily in labeling the gifts and writing funny little rhymes for each one, while Granny chuckled over her own duplicity, as she thought,

"Yes, it certainly *'might'* take some time' for 'em to get there, if I calculated to send 'em. But I'll 'see about sending 'em' up in the attic to-morrow to stay till her ma gits here. I declare, Granny Wilson, you're a bad one!"

"My mother says she'll give a gallon o' m'lasses an' make it into candy for the tree," Sally Brown announced one morning. "An' Bob Mulvey's mother says she'll give peanuts."

"That will be fine," Miss Mitchell assured her.

"You can have all the hick'ry nuts you want," Jack said. "Will an' I gathered lots of 'em this fall. You don't mind givin' some, do you, Will?"

Will, a smaller edition of his brother, gallantly signified his willingness to sacrifice the entire supply if

necessary, while Frank and Mary Johnson offered as many "nice red apples" as were desired.

"We shall be rich," Miss Mitchell declared. "And I think you may prepare the invitations to-day, instead of writing in your copy-books."

Pretty stars had been cut for the purpose and one side covered with silver paper. The other side bore the legend in the best handwriting possible:

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER: You are invited to a Christmas tree at the school-house on Friday, at 2 p. m."

The youngest children had folded dainty envelopes of the palest blue and pink in sufficient number for the school, the invitations were enclosed, directed, sealed with a silver star, and proudly carried home.

Then Miss Mitchell appointed Harry, Jack and Joe, the three eldest boys, a committee to obtain a tree from the woods. The first two agreed with unmixed pleasure, but greatly to her surprise there was a slight shadow on Joe's brow. It was but momentary. In an instant he was as cheerful as the others, but she could not help wondering what had caused the frown.

"I don't mind, at all, if you would rather not help get the tree, Joe," she said to him privately.

"Oh! I would."

"You looked a little disappointed at first, or so I fancied. If there is anything else that you had planned to do, don't bother. I don't mind in the least."

"But I really want to, Miss Mitchell. I s'pose," coloring, "I s'pose I looked kind of queer because you put Harry on the committee. I can't *bear* him."

"Joe, please don't."

"Well! I can't, and there's no use pretendin' anything else. He's a born sneak. Before you came he used to be the teachers' tattle-tale, always running to them with some wonderful story."

Jean was silent. She had had several difficult experiences with that trait of the boy in question and could understand how obnoxious the fault must be to frank-hearted Joe. At the same time she knew that Harry felt for Joe the unconscious admiration often yielded to one person by another of totally different nature. She had seen him look at the younger boy with amazement when the latter had made some particularly ingenuous statement.

"I think Harry likes you," she said thoughtfully. "Have you ever tried to like *him*?"

Joe looked puzzled. "I guess liking doesn't come for trying. And I'm sure I never could care for *that* fellow, if I tried for a year."

"Try a little while, for *my* sake," Jean suggested and had the satisfaction of seeing him treat Harry thereafter with a cordiality which astonished the latter.

The eventful day came at last. Everything was in readiness. The last gift had been completed and labeled. The booklets were very pretty. Even careless Jake and stolid Gretchen had taken the utmost pains with theirs and regarded the finished product with proud delight. Dainty sprigs of holly had been carefully painted upon the covers which were tied together with narrow ribbon. All the gifts were simple and many of them had been made during the noon hour, but much love had gone into their manufacture, and their makers were happy and satisfied.

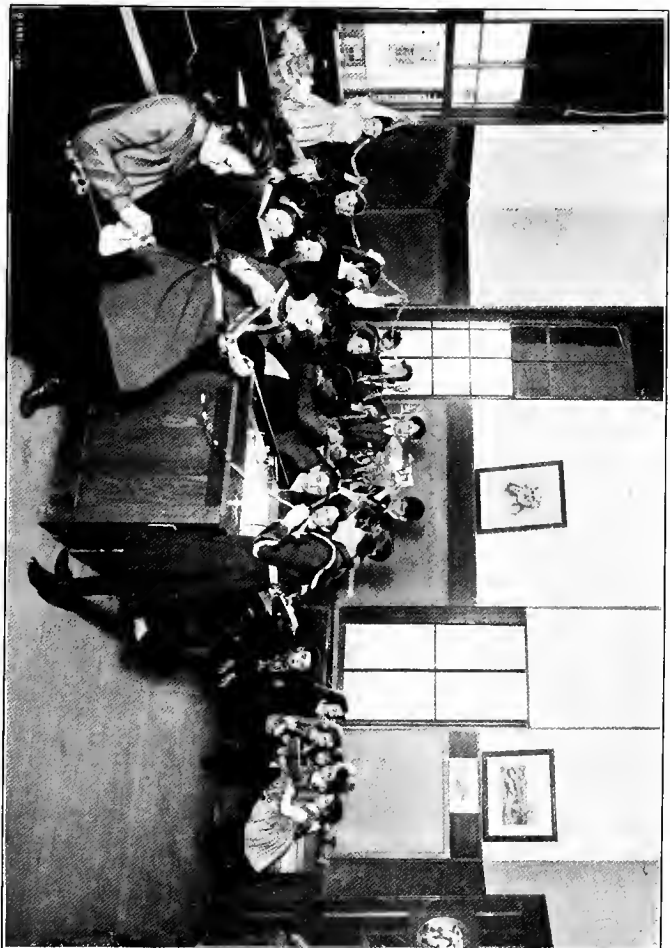
There were penwipers cut from gay cloth in the shape of autumn leaves. Tiny boxes had been covered with quaint designs in parquetry and made nice receptacles for buttons or other small articles. Match-scratchers had been made by covering with sand-paper the two flat sides of the empty card-board rolls that had once held baby ribbon, attaching worsted loops so that they might be hung up, and then wrapping a strip of bright-colored paper around the curved side. There were blotters, too, with sewing-cards for covers, each one bearing a Christmas emblem outlined with worsted

and many other gifts of the children's own manufacture.

The sand-table was covered with things ready to be hung on the tree at noon. Shining chains of scarlet and white made by Harold's class, stars covered with gilt paper by the next two grades, nuts wrapped in tin-foil and fringed paper, strings of pink and white popcorn, gay cornucopias containing sticky but toothsome lumps of molasses candy, and a pile of rosy-cheeked apples rubbed until their fat sides were glossy; all these made an array which the children considered marvelous.

The tree itself stood proud and straight in its standard. It was a beautiful one. The committee had done their work well, and could have told of many anxious consultations and comparisons, but were perfectly satisfied with their final choice.

As the morning waned, a hush came over the school differing from its usual quiet industry. Miss Mitchell knew it was the silence of joyous anticipation. She knew, too, that in the afternoon her boys and girls would be full of merriment and fun, and there would be no opportunity for much besides. That last half-hour of the morning was just the time to bring to those young hearts the keynote of the Yule-tide, and so while



WORKING FOR CHRISTMAS AT THE NOON HOUR.—December.

the happy silence rested over the old school-room, she said softly :

Children, I've left the loveliest, sweetest story for the last. It's an old, old story. You've all heard it many times, but you will be glad to hear it again, for no one ever tires of listening to it,—the beautiful true story of Christmas.

It is just getting dark in the fields near the little town of Bethlehem. There are shepherds out there watching over their flocks. The white sheep and lambs are lying on the ground, huddled close together, while the stars begin to glimmer up in the sky.

After a while the air grows chilly. Then the men build watch-fires and sit down in front of them talking quietly to one another. The moon comes up, and they can see the white roofs of the houses, and the little lights that twinkle here and there through the shadows.

"See! there is that beautiful star again," one shepherd says. His companions look up at the sky. There, through the soft darkness shines a star brighter and lovelier than all the others. It is the Christmas star, but the shepherds do not know that, for there has never been a Christmas before.

Oh! how quiet it is up there on the hillside as the hours pass by. The men can hear nothing but the low

rustle of the wind among the olive trees, the faint tinkling of bells when one of the sheep moves in its sleep, or perhaps the flutter of some night-bird's wings overhead.

They talk softly of the star and their flocks. Suddenly one of them cries, "Look! Look!"

The most beautiful light glows in the sky. It lights up the green hillside and the little town of Bethlehem with a wonderful radiance. The shepherds wonder if they can be dreaming. Year after year they have watched their flocks, but never before have they seen anything like this. And then all at once a shining white-robed angel stands beside them. The shepherds are afraid. They fall down on their faces on the waving grass, but the angel says gently :

"Do not be afraid! For behold! I bring you tidings of great joy, for you and for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. And this is the way you may find Him. He is a little Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

Then in a moment they see a great throng of other angels singing together. Their voices are sweeter than the sweetest music, and the song they sing is the happiest the world has ever heard.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!"

Then the lovely light fades, the shining angels go away into heaven, and the shepherds are alone on the hillside with only the sleeping flock and the silent night around them.

"Let us go and find the Baby," they say. So they leave their sheep in the care of one or two of the men and start away in the starlight for the town near by. The little town is very quiet. Everyone seems to be asleep. The blind beggar is asleep by the roadside. The rich ruler slumbers in his home. No one except themselves has seen the light or heard the wonderful music.

At last they come to a humble inn. There is a cave back of it where cattle are sheltered. The inn is crowded with people, and the stable itself is full of sheep and camels.

The shepherds go in hastily, for they know the Child they seek must be here in this poor place. Yes, there in one of the mangers from which the cattle eat, they see a little Baby, dimpled and fair and sweet, and near-by is His mother, a sweet-faced woman whose name is Mary. She is looking tenderly at the tiny Boy, dreaming of what He may grow to be by and by, just

as your mothers did when you were wee babies. She kisses the rosy hands and the wee feet, and loves the little Stranger with all her warm mother love; but she does not know that in the years to come those kind hands will be quick to heal the sick, and those feet, that are so small and dimpled now, will some day go wearily up and down the narrow streets of that old land on errands for others, carrying help and comfort wherever they go; for this is the little Christ Child who has just come from heaven.

The shepherds fall down and worship Him, and then they go away, telling the wonderful story of what they have seen and heard. As long as they live they will remember this first Christmas Day, and will love to tell their children of the angel chorus they heard once in the stillness of the night on the hills of Bethlehem.

And so each year at this time we ring the Christmas bells and sing the Christmas songs, for on Christmas Day long, long ago, the beautiful Christ-Child came to love us all, and to help even little children to be good and true and gentle.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE TREE.



H! MISS MITCHELL, you ought to see folks acomin'!" cried Frances Mailler, her round eyes big with wonder. "It looks just like a *fun'ral* comin' up the road."

Miss Mitchell had to laugh at the comparison, although she understood that those were the largest gatherings Frances had ever seen.

It was not quite two o'clock, but many hands had made light work and everything was in readiness for the visitors. Harry, Joe and Jack, who were deeply impressed with their own importance, acted as ushers and wore a sprig of holly as a badge of that high office.

The crowd kept increasing until the school-room was completely filled. There were anxious faces, gay

faces, thoughtful faces among the company, and many a father and mother felt a stir of unwonted interest in the proceedings, for had not the children given wonderful accounts of the plans made, and was not this *their* Christmas tree?

Sandy Duncan sat in the front row, with his sharp little eyes twinkling. There, too, were the three trustees, a trio who tried in vain to look as dignified as they fancied the occasion demanded. In spite of themselves they could not refrain from indulging in little chuckles of reminiscent delight, as Mr. Martin, who had evidently been another "Joe," gave them sly nudges and whispered anecdotes of things that had happened when they were all boys together in the old school-room. Joe himself was somewhat disturbed over this reprehensible conduct on his father's part, but the latter broke the ice and set everyone at ease by saying:

"Now, Miss Mitchell, this is to be an afternoon o' fun, ain't it? An' everybody is to feel free to talk an' enjoy themselves? I thought so. I knowed I understood ye right. I see that boy o' mine a-shakin' his head at me every oncet in a while as if he thinks I ain't actin' proper in school. But teacher says we kin all do as we please."

Everyone laughed and Miss Mitchell said pleasantly:

"We haven't any regular 'set' program for the afternoon, for we want you all to feel at home. After a while the children will sing some Christmas songs and we shall have a few exercises, but we want you to talk and have a good time first, for this is *your* tree, you know."

The buzz of conversation soon filled the room while the ushers were kept busy finding seats for the fresh arrivals. Three seats directly in front of the platform had been left vacant. Miss Mitchell wondered why the boys did not use them for the guests, and took pains to point them out more than once, but greatly to her surprise each time she did so the ushers retreated to the door where she could see them convulsed with mirth.

Suddenly, however, she became conscious that an air of interest pervaded the room, and that Joe was gallantly leading Granny Wilson and two strangers to the seats in question. She stared in incredulous wonder at the two latter. Strangers? Why, they could not be—yes! they really *were* her mother and Ruth! For one moment she sat in bewildered joy,—the next, forgetting the crowd and the watching eyes

of the girls and boys, and remembering only that her mother was there, her *mother* whom she had not seen for almost four months, she ran into the arms outstretched to meet her, with a glad little cry that went straight home to every heart in the room.

It was the happiest afternoon! Outside the white drifts of snow gleamed and glittered and shone in the sunlight, as if each separate flake knew it must sparkle its best for Christmas, while within there was the sweetest, merriest time imaginable. How Mrs. Mitchell's gentle face glowed with pleasure as she looked and listened! How Ruth's dark eyes flashed and danced as she admired the pretty decorations of the room! As for Jean, the boys and girls hardly knew their quiet little teacher. A pretty flush burned in her soft cheeks and little dimples came and went whenever she smiled. She had not known how homesick she really was, but now with the old tender smile from the familiar face meeting her each moment she could not be happy enough.

All the children caught the spirit of gladness. How sweetly they sang! How well they spoke their Christmas "pieces!" And then when the time came for the distribution of gifts, what fun and laughter! How proud the parents were of their children's productions!

How some of the tired faces brightened at the thought of the love displayed! How Mrs. Wall exulted over the blotter and book Freddy had made for her!

"He vas so goot to his mutter," she declared with her beaming smile. "I t'inks I haf nefer saw so goot a poy! Dese gif's I vill keep mit me so long as I lif!"

Everyone had to admire the tree itself, and it was worthy of admiration. There could be no twinkling tapers upon it because of the paper articles it held, but it was as bright and pretty as could be desired.

The room, too, had been decorated for the occasion. Evergreen was wreathed and twined everywhere, with the glossy scarlet berries of the black alder shining out among it. On one of the side blackboards three children were hanging up their stockings beside a cosy fire-place, on another appeared the wonderful sleigh and the eight tiny reindeer with Santa Claus muffled in furs; while on still another a snow-covered roof and chimney were to be seen, with old Santa disappearing down the latter. Over the front board hung an exquisite picture of the Madonna looking down with a wealth of love at the little Christ-Child in her arms. The board beneath was bright with stars glimmering through what looked like misty clouds. Among them in pretty letters were the words:

We are shining Christmas stars;
The world is white with snow,
And through the clouds that hurry by
Our cheery tapers glow.
We watch the flowers in their sleep,
The robins where they rest,
Our silver radiance softly lights
The bluebird's empty nest.

We watch the children, small and dear,
Tucked safely in their beds,
And all night long we twinkle bright
Far, far above their heads.
We shine to tell the love of God,
Who set us all aglow;
We bring a message soft and sweet
Of Christmas long ago.

Miss Mitchell had prepared gifts for the pupils. They were necessarily inexpensive, for she had not felt that it would be right for her to spend much money upon them when her mother and Ruth needed all she could spare, but simple as they were, they pleased the recipients most fully. Almost all the children had some little remembrance for her, too, some of which

were very funny, but Jean saw only the love that had prompted them.

As she looked over the room she could see that all of the parents were present except Mr. White and Mr. Stevens. Jack had told her he was afraid his father would not come, but would be glad to have the booklet he had made. Harry had said absolutely nothing. If he had written any name on his gifts, she had not seen it, but fancying that he seemed more lonely than usual she did her utmost to make him share the general cheerfulness.

Everyone lingered and lingered, loath to go when the presents had been distributed. Jean's mother and sister had to be introduced to all the kindly country folk and to the boys and girls as well. The latter shyly made friends with Ruth, whose bright young face attracted them, but the gentle grace of Mrs. Mitchell fascinated old and young alike. She knew almost all the children from Jean's description of them in her letters and pleased Joe by saying, "You look just as I thought you did, so gay and light-hearted."

For Harry she had also a word. "Jean tells me you are her 'big boy' " she said, "and I have noticed how kind you are to the little ones." Harry liked that and talked to her with more frank confidence than

Jean had ever seen him manifest, while Evelyn hovered around the sweet little lady like a bee around a flower.

At last, warned by the gathering twilight and the sunset lights wavering over the snow, Jean struck the chord for the closing song, and the happy afternoon was ended.

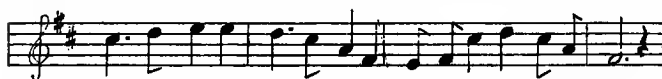
AT CHRISTMAS.



Idly swing the milkweed cradles, empty pods of brown and gray,



But the white-winged seeds, like birdies, all have fluttered far away.



And the little brook that sweetly through the summer sang its song,



Now goes tinkle, tinkle softly under icy bridges strong.

In the wind the dry leaves rustle,
Fern and flower are folded deep,
And the snow is drifting lightly
Where the withered grasses sleep.

Oh! December, dear December,
Cold and snow are thine, we know,
But the bells of Christmas echo,
And the stars of Christmas glow.

Other months their pleasure bring us,
Other months with beauty shine,
But the radiance and the splendor
Of a sweeter charm is thine.

Merry Christmas! ring the carols,
Merry Christmas, softly say,
For the little Christ-Child sendeth
Joy to every child to-day.



CHAPTER IX.

BEN.



ANUARY brought a new pupil. The first morning of the new term just before the session began, Joe cried:

"Miss Mitchell, look quick! I believe we're going to have the giant this year.

Oh! say, boys and girls, Ben Burton's coming."

"Oh! isn't that splendid?" exclaimed Will.

"I lite Ben," chirped Dorothy.

"Who is he? where is he?" asked Miss Mitchell, catching the contagion of the general excitement.

"Why! he's the biggest boy you ever saw. He only comes winters and sometimes not then. See! there he is, and he's really steering this way."

The next moment the doorway was darkened by

a tall, well-made figure attired in awkward, ill-fitting clothes.

"Good mornin', teacher," he said heartily.

In spite of herself Miss Mitchell could not restrain her amusement as he towered above her.

"I beg your pardon," she murmured.

The giant laughed good-naturedly. "Don't mind," he said. "I'm used to it. Everybody laughs when they first see me. I'm kind o' imposin' like." He looked around the room with much curiosity.

"Looks fine," was his decision, pronounced in pleased tones. "The youngsters doin' any studyin' this year?"

"Suppose I let them answer for themselves," and Miss Mitchell turned to them with a smile.

There was a general chorus of affirmation, then Joe added with some anxiety:

"We're all right, Ben. There isn't any fooling, honest and true. You'll stay, won't you?"

The big fellow gazed at the teacher in steady contemplation for two or three minutes.

"I guess I'll tackle it ag'in," he said slowly. "I wouldn't wonder if you an' me don't hit it off pretty good. I'm workin' for Mr. Evans, out about three miles from here. He lets me go to school winters. I

ain't been goin' for the last year or so, 'count o' the carryin's on they've had. I ain't got nothin' ag'in the teachers. Some of 'em was real good to me. An' I ain't complainin' o' the boys, for they ain't bad chaps. But they suttinly did raise partic'lar Ned down here, an' I couldn't study none. *I'm older 'n they are. I'm *eighteen*." He spoke as if it were eighty. "An' I want to learn an' make somethin' o' myself."

Miss Mitchell's face showed the respect she felt. "I think you will have no difficulty," she said, "and I thank you for speaking so frankly."

"Got any special place where you want to stow me? No? Then I guess I'll set right down here. Takes a high seat to 'commodate a feller o' my size."

He was soon absorbed in work, to which he devoted entire attention. Miss Mitchell watched him with curiosity. This new pupil was an original character, she decided.

At recess the others gathered around him while from the depths of his pockets he produced nuts and apples which he divided with painstaking care among the group. Little Dorothy perched on his shoulder. He was evidently a great favorite with all. They clung to him joking and teasing until Jean fancied they would make him angry.

"Joe," she suggested, "perhaps Ben doesn't like to be teased so much."

Ben turned toward her a face beaming with good nature.

"Don't you worry a mite, teacher. They like it, an' I don't mind. I kin stop 'em as soon as they git *too* far, can't I, Joe? You imp, you!"

Suddenly reaching out one big hand, he seized the boy firmly by the collar, held him out at arm's length in spite of his kicks and struggles, and finally deposited him gently on the ground.

"Don't hurt him a mite," he explained, benevolently. "He's used to it. I kin take one in each hand, his size."

Joe had risen by that time, laughing and breathless. "Do it again," he begged.

Ben looked at Miss Mitchell. "Makes you kind o' nervous, don't it? You ain't used to me yit. Clear out now, youngsters, I want to talk to teacher."

They scattered obediently, so Ben leaned back against a tree and gave his whole mind to the conversation.

"Do you think I'm too old to learn to be a doctor?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, that's what I lay out to be. I've always wanted to, ever since I was a little fellow. I know a good deal about it that I've picked up ever since the idee got in my mind. Old Doctor Clyde ain't the kind I mean. There was one came here oncet to visit at



the minister's. I was workin' for Mis' Stubbs then, an' it happened that she fell down cellar an' broke her arm same time the old doctor got taken sick, so I went for the stranger. Dr. Clarkson his name was, an' I tell you he was *grand*! He just went right to work an' set that bone as neat as you please, with me a-helpin' what little I could; an' when we got through he turned to me, an' sez he, 'My boy, if you'll come to me when you've studied a little more I'll make a first-rate surgeon out of you.' I ain't never seen him since, but I've heerd from him an' we ain't nuther one o' us the kind to furgit. It's the talkin' bothers me more'n anything else. One teacher give me a grammar an' I've studied it consid'able." He produced a well-thumbed copy from his pocket. "But I can't make head nur tail to the pesky thing."

"You need a little explanation."

"You bet I do. More'n a little. Now I've got a plan that would be a big help to me, an' yit I don't like to bother you. But if you didn't mind—if it ain't too much trouble—would you just listen pretty sharp when I talk an' then ev'ry night tell me some o' the mistakes I've made? I'd be glad as glad could be an' I'd try hard an' remember next time."

"Try *to* remember," Jean suggested, slyly.

"That's it! That's right! That's just what I meant!" the big lad chuckled. "I'll try *to* remember. An' if there's anything I kin do for you I'll try *to* do that. I'm big an' rough, but yit I'm gentle, an' I guess we'll suit each other tip-top. You needn't worry about my hurtin' the children. They all like me. That is, all but Harry Stevens."

"Why doesn't Harry?"

The good-natured face clouded over a little.

"We had a fallin' out one day," he said, frankly. "You see, Harry's a pretty big sneak; not meanin' any offense. An' the last teacher that was here when I was a man. Trustee give him the right to lick an' he done consid'able thrashin. One day he tackled a little girl, 'count o' something Harry had done himself, an' then sneaked out of. I couldn't stand that, somehow or other, so goin' home I give Harry a little taste o' "

what he'd ort to have got in school. I don't bear him no malice. I brung him some apples the next day, but he ain't never furgive me, nur never will."

"*Brought* him some apples, and *has* never forgiven me," murmured Jean, feeling that the case was almost hopeless.

"Thanky. Number two an' number three, 'Brought some apples' an' 'has never forgiven.' You'll be tired, I guess. Another teacher oncet promised to help me that way, but she got ashamed for me. She'd tell me a few mistakes an' then slip over the others, 'cause she tuk a notion that I'd feel bad. I ain't ashamed, for I've never had no chance to learn such things. I don't generally talk so much an' that kinder hides my ign'rance. I've got a likin' for you, though, an' I sorter wanted us to understand each other. I won't git mad no matter how often you c'rect me."

Jean could not keep a twinkle of mirth out of her eyes, but she spoke with sincere respect.

"Very well, Ben. I'll do the best I can. You are sure to succeed if you keep that spirit."

As the days went by she found that he had spoken truly. Invariably good-natured, with a pleasant word for all, the children adored him and he was never tired of exerting himself for their amusement. In spite of



NOON-TIME.

the fact that he had always "worked out," and for that reason had been unable to attend school regularly, he had made good use of the few opportunities he had had and was far in advance of the other pupils in almost every subject. For physiology he had a passionate devotion. Miss Mitchell, who had always rather disliked the pictures in the text-books on that subject and fancied she could not become interested in the study, was surprised to see how different the matter seemed after Ben's advent.

He would sit for a half-hour at a time studying the plates with unfeigned delight, and then exclaim:

"I tell you, we're made in the grandest way, ain't we? Every little bone's got its own place an' its own work to do, an' they're all made exactly right, too; just strong enough an' yit not too heavy. Wonderful, ain't it? Isn't it, I mean."

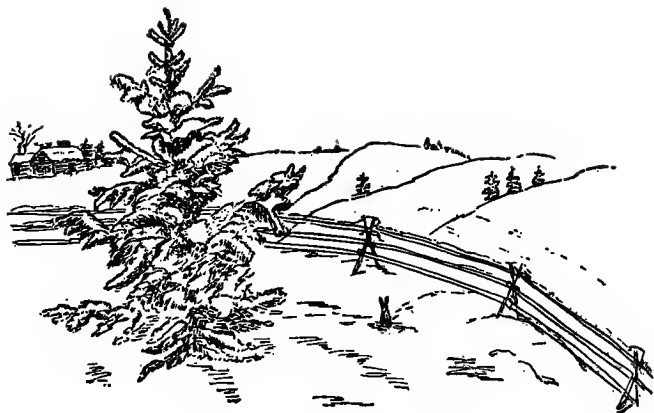
Nothing pleased him better than to have her correct his grammar. Whenever she told a story he listened critically, and more than once she found a little paper on which he had jotted some expression novel to his experience.

"You are a great help to me, Ben," she said one day after he had been in the class for two or three weeks. "It is an inspiration to watch you study."

Ben drew a long breath.

"I've only got three months," he said, "January, February and March, an' I'm bound to make the most of 'em."

"Make the most of them" he did, and while the winter winds whistled over the wide fields the happy children worked and studied, feeling the unconscious example of the latest comer and the uplifting influence of his unfaltering ambition.



CHAPTER X.

IN THE SNOW.

THE world was lost in snow. There were great drifts in the fields and meadows and by the side of the school-house. Every twig in the woods hung heavy with its weight of gleaming jewels. The tiny gray and brown nests swung idly back and forth filled to the brim with a lining softer than fleece. The pretty seeds of a hundred plants rattled over the shining crust whenever the wind blew. Now and then a gray squirrel scampered along the crooked fences searching for food. The little leaf-babies curled more closely in

their brown cradles, and not a glimpse of any green thing could be seen out of doors except the pines, cedars and hemlocks bending beneath their load of snow or a few ferns still braving the winter from their home behind the sheltering gray rocks. Every day Miss Mitchell and the children found it hard work to make their way along the path, but they kept on bravely. It was always bright inside, no matter how dark and cloudy the day might be without.

The pupils were learning more and more how to concentrate their attention upon study. Miss Mitchell tried to make every separate bit of knowledge seem a distinct gain. Sometimes at the close of the day she would say, "Who can tell something new that we have learned?" and each child took pleasure in recalling at least one thing. She had endless resources for brightening the arithmetic lessons, but spent no time upon examples which would be of no practical use to the pupils. This was rank heresy to the minds of the parents and trustees alike. Even Mr. Eliott, who was one of her warmest advocates, looked askance at the idea.

"The proper way is to give 'em the hull thing," he said. "Our children hev allers ciphered clean through the book. It's the way *we* was brought up,

too. Begin at the beginnin' an' go straight to the end. This way o' skippin' an' jumpin' an' leavin' some things out, it may be all right, but I'm afeard the folks wont like it. 'Rithmetic, now, is the most important thing there is. I remember how our teachers used to spend 'most all their time onto it."

Jean smiled, reflecting silently that some of it might have been spent to better advantage in correcting mistakes in grammar. Seeing the smile he was struck by a sudden suspicion, too grave to be lightly spoken.

"Mebbe," he said in tones of incredulous horror, "mebbe you don't think 'rithmetic *is* the most important?"

"I don't," Jean answered frankly.

"*Well! Well!* Now what do you s'pose gits ahead o' it?"

"Reading, for one thing."

Her listener laughed. "Readin'," he repeated, with some contempt. "Why! child, anyone kin learn to *read*."

"Suppose I grant that," the girl said quietly. "It is nevertheless the key that opens the door to more knowledge, and that of a wider kind, than any other single study. But the fact remains that many do *not*

learn to read, that is, with any fluency or understanding. It seems to me that that is the most useful knowledge a school can give."

"Well! 'rithmetic comes next," and Mr. Eliott gave a wise nod.

Jean's views were different. She refrained from expressing them, however, only asking mischievously:

"Did you ever study partial payments when you were in school?"

"Partial payments? Air they in the 'rithmetic? Yes-sum; I've figgered all the way to the back. Some o' them examples was old stumpers, too, but they couldn't beat *me*."

Miss Mitchell tried to look properly impressed. "How many have you worked since?" she ventured to inquire.

"Nary a one. I ain't had the time to tackle 'em, an' I ain't had any use for 'em."

"That is just the reason why I don't like to waste time over some of those difficult subjects. There are parts of the arithmetic which the pupils will find useful all their lives. They will be better prepared for everyday practical life by having had a thorough drill upon them so that they can work the problems easily and quickly. Don't you think it is better to give more attention to them?"

"Hem! Mebbe so. Mebbe so."

It was clear that he was not convinced, so she added merrily:

"Come around to-morrow and let me show you what we are doing. I think you will be satisfied."

Promptly at nine o'clock the next morning the trustee appeared in a state of mingled curiosity and disapproval. After the opening exercises, which were brief but pleasing, Miss Mitchell called the third year class for a rapid drill in addition. Mr. Elliott leaned forward with interest.

"I'm a fust-rate hand at that," he announced rashly, then stared aghast at the celerity with which the children announced the totals of the long columns which Jean wrote upon the board.

"Nine an' a six makes fifteen and a three makes eighteen an' a four makes twenty-two," he whispered to himself as quickly as possible, only to find that eager hands were already waving while eager lips were waiting to declare the whole sum to be one hundred sixty-three or whatever the case might be.

"Let's hear the big boys an' girls," he suggested. "I don't believe they kin do as well as the small ones."

Miss Mitchell explained that the class in question had been studying percentage for some time and were

ready for some quick mental work on that subject, if he would enjoy it. There was no napping in the class. Each pupil rose when called, gave a problem and then asked for the answer from anyone he or she chose. The examples given were all practical ones, well worded, and were answered with a vim and snap that showed how clearly the different principles were understood. Many of the questions had been prepared outside of school hours, although Miss Mitchell had not required it. The written work which followed was conducted on a similar plan. One problem given by Joe proved to be what he pronounced "a puzzler." Jean offered to explain it, but to the visitor's surprise the class requested her to let them try it until the next day.

Mr. Elliott yielded reluctant admiration as he took his departure after the session was over.

"The hull thing is ag'in my idee's o' what should be done," he said. "You spent enough sight more time on readin' an' language lessons than you did on 'rithmetic, which is right ag'inst all I've ever heerd. An' yit," in a burst of enthusiasm, "I never see sich quick work in all my life nur a better understandin' than what them boys an' girls showed. I guess you're all right, Miss Mitchell. You fix the studies to suit

yourself, an' we'll stand by you. You've got a pretty level head on your shoulders."

There were plenty of interesting subjects for the morning talks during January. The graceful tracery of the bare boughs against the sky, their softened outlines after a snowstorm, the frost pictures on the window panes, the life of the squirrels and other wild things in the woods and fields, the nests of the tiny brown field mice hidden in the stumps of gray old trees, the beautiful starry forms of the falling snow-flakes, the odd tracks made by rabbits across the pure carpet of snow, the cocoons hanging from the ragged weeds, and the sturdy evergreens that defied the chill winds, all furnished themes that were of absorbing interest.

Ben proved a great source of information in these studies. His keen eyes had kept sharp watch and had noted many of nature's secrets. It was he who brought to school a collection of birds' nests and many cocoons. The former he secured with much trouble, some of them requiring a long, hard climb, but the "bird-corner" looked very odd and pretty with its branches and nests, while the cocoons were put into a large box to wait for their spring awakening when the wonderful mystery of life would be unveiled to the watchers. It was Ben, too, who brought a box con-

taining about a square foot and a half of ground cut from the woods.

"We'll have fun seeing how many plants are hidden in it," he explained, and it certainly proved fascinating to watch the little shoots sprout and grow in the warmth of the school-room. There were anemones, violets, baby oak trees, early saxifrage and two or three varieties of grasses, all of which sent up a luxuriant growth.

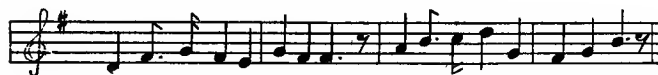
Miss Mitchell's copy of Gibson's "Sharp Eyes" was a general favorite with its numerous readers, and one morning, in accordance with one of its suggestions, Jack brought to school several "yellow edge" butterflies, which he had found in the crevices of an old barn. They made themselves at home at once and formed a charming picture as they hovered among the flowers on the broad window shelf.

The calendar for January was a bit of rustic fence near which stood a pine tree laden with snow. The January song was written below.

SNOW-FLAKES.



Down from the cloudy sky they fall, glimmering flakes so soft and small.



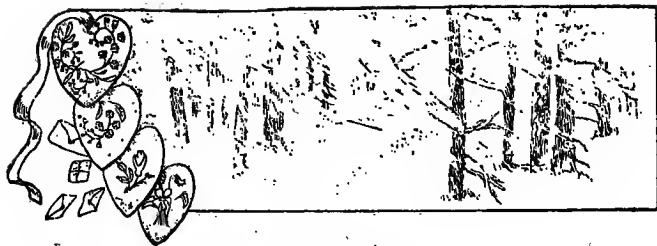
Over the fields and meadows bare, weaving a carpet white and fair



Fairy weavers, how swift they go, whirling their white webs to and fro!

Silently sent, no sound we hear,
Quietly drifting far and near,
Dancing on every passing breeze,
Sparkling on grasses, ferns and trees;
Fairy weavers, they work and play
All through the night or all the day.

What is your message, snow-flakes small?
What do you whisper as you fall?
Coming when winter days are cold,
Yours is a story plainly told.
Floating down from the clouds above,
Silent proofs of a Father's love.



CHAPTER XI.

FEBRUARY.

FEBRUARY was rich in suggestions for varied work. Early in the month came Lincoln's birthday. Drawings of the log cabin in which he spent his boyhood days were made by the children who delighted to write what they called "Picture Stories." Outlines of leaves, flowers, houses, etc., scattered along the margin of their writing gave it an added charm to their childish eyes, and they would gladly write page after page of description. Sometimes Miss Mitchell let them paste here and there on the pages tiny pictures which had been cut from old magazines or papers. They enjoyed that, too, but their own original illustrations had a deeper magic and produced even better results.

It would be hard to tell which class took most interest in the life of Lincoln. Ben's eyes kindled with admiration, and Jack drew long sighs of satisfaction, while the small pupils caught the enthusiasm and seemed to understand and appreciate the nobility of the man. Knowing that children are often the fiercest partisans, giving blind allegiance to any leader who appeals to their emotions, Miss Mitchell wisely spoke no word which could arouse any ill-feeling. She saw no reason to perpetuate the bitterness which had animated the north and south forty years ago, but which has long since been dispelled by the sympathy of common joys and sorrows. While her stories were true to history, she led her listeners to value the bravery shown on both sides, gave to each one a reverence for heroism whenever or wherever displayed, and brought each into close touch with the great heart of the man who from the humblest surroundings worked his way to the highest position in the nation's gift.

For Valentine Day she showed the little ones how to make pretty valentines for their mothers. Hearts cut from tinted cardboard were edged with scalloped paper, a border of tiny blue forget-me-nots was painted around them and in the center were the words,

"I love you, dearest mother mine!
You are my sweetest valentine!"

"What fun it will be to surprise them at home!"
Jean suggested.

It was a pretty sight when school was out to see each small conspirator tip-toe up to his or her own door, lay the envelope on the top step with its address, "For Mother," turned plainly upward, knock loudly, and then run to hide while the door was opened and the envelope discovered with many exclamations of surprise and pleasure.

The morning after Valentine Day 'Squire Bronton paid a visit to the school. He was a red haired, hot tempered little man whose words came so quickly that they reminded one of explosives.

"The big boys run in my wheat field an' track down my winter wheat," he complained angrily. "When I tell 'em to go away they laugh. I want you to keep 'em out. They go in every mornin' when they come to school. I'll horsewhip 'em if I catch 'em! Meddlesome, sassy, impident citters!"



Miss Mitchell expressed regret that he had been annoyed and promised to investigate the matter. Muttering more threats the irate squire finally took his departure. After he had gone Miss Mitchell made inquiries. She found that the older boys, especially Joe and Frank, had been in the habit of going across Mr. Bronton's land on their way to and from school, more from a spirit of mischief than anything else, that they might enjoy the fun of teasing the irascible farmer by their presence. The path through the field was no nearer, indeed was a little out of the way, but there was a sort of fascination in exciting Mr. Bronton and making him, as Joe said, "angry enough to shake somebody."

Jean saw that the fun had so far been harmless, but was certainly doing the boys no good, while it was fostering a tendency which might develop into maliciousness.

"No one is to go there again without permission," she said at last.

"I don't see why," Joe grumbled. "We just go along the edge of the field. It doesn't hurt the wheat a mite, and he's as cross as can be."

"I think I know someone else who is a little cross just now," Miss Mitchell said merrily.

Joe gave an unwilling smile.

"Well, I don't see any reason for staying out," he muttered.

Miss Mitchell glanced at him with some displeasure.

"There was a very good reason at first," she said quietly. "For you had no right to trespass when Mr. Bronton wished you to keep away. And now there is another reason, for I distinctly forbid any boy or girl to go there."

Joe looked inclined for mutiny but thought better of it and went to work again. He had discovered that he had less influence over Miss Mitchell than he had had over her predecessors. He might kick the desk when he was angry, he might sulk in a corner all recess, or stalk haughtily away into the woods in a rage;—all this had apparently no effect on Miss Mitchell. She never scolded. She was never cross. He simply found himself utterly ignored until his good nature returned. To a nature like Joe's, desirous always to be in the foreground, this was the severest penalty that could be imposed. Always a period of probation, longer or shorter, as the case might be, elapsed between his misconduct and his restoration to the privileges which the others enjoyed. Always he

had to earn back the respect which by some instinct he felt he had forfeited, although no one had ever told him so.

February was a cold snowy month. The sleighing was good, yet the ice on the river was as smooth as glass. Every noon teacher and pupils spent an hour in coasting or skating, returning to work with glowing cheeks and brightened eyes.

One noon an amusing incident happened. Jack and Ben had been skating together in a race, but the long legs of the latter gave him a decided advantage and he soon left Jack behind. The younger boy, panting from the heat of his exertions, threw off his overcoat and sat down on the bank in the chilling wind to "cool off a bit," as he said laughingly. Miss Mitchell would have warned him, but before she came near enough she heard Ben shout, "Get up from there an' put on your coat."

"Guess not," laughed Jack.

The next instant Ben swooped down on him like a whirlwind, the coat went on like a flash and Jack shook back and forth in the strong grasp that held him. Jean flew to the rescue, foreboding the total destruction of the weaker lad, but to her astonishment both boyish faces reflected only good nature, and Ben exclaimed:

"The big gump took off his coat an' sat down here in the cold. It's enough to kill him. I just shook him up a bit to warm him. Some folks ain't got sense enough to take care o' their health."

"Oh! Ben! Ben!" Jean gasped, so relieved that tears and laughter struggled for the mastery. "If you don't treat your future patients with a little more ceremony I'm afraid they'll dismiss you."

Ben grinned. "Sorry I scared you, but I didn't dare to leave him set there like that." Then anxiously, "It didn't hurt, did it, Jack, old boy?"

"Not—not much," Jack gasped, still breathless.

"Ben must be one of the old school of physicians. He evidently believes that desperate diseases require desperate remedies," and Miss Mitchell laughed till she cried, for the picture Jack had presented rose before her with fresh force, while the older boy was so plainly unconscious of his own strength.

As the month passed the weather proved almost ideal for winter; clear, cold and sunshiny with a frosty sting that sent the blood tingling through the veins.

Mr. Miller came to Miss Mitchell with a plan one afternoon.

"My boy Jim thinks everything of you, teacher. His ma an' me air real pleased at the way he gits

along, an' says I to her yesterday, says I, 'I wonder if Miss Mitchell wouldn't like to take them youngsters on a sleighride?' You see, I've got a big bob sled that would hold the hull lot easy, an' there's a couple o' good safe hosses you kin hev. Joe Martin or Frank or Ben kin drive fust-rate, an' if you like the idee, why I'll bring the old bob around to the school-house some night this week, an' away you go!"

Miss Mitchell thanked him heartily. The children next morning hailed the prospect with great jubilation. It was decided that Friday night would be the best time to go. As Jean did not think it quite safe for the little ones to be out so long in the cold night air, she arranged to have them come to Granny Wilson's for a candy pull the next Saturday. This saved many a heart-break, and large and small alike looked forward to the pleasure in store, but an event occurred which took away all Miss Mitchell's enjoyment.



CHAPTER XII.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE school was surprised Thursday morning by the entrance of 'Squire Bronton, who looked even fiercer and more pugnacious than ever as he thundered out in his sharpest tones:

"Now, then, teacher, I want to know which one o' yer plaguey boys has been in my field ag'in. You promised to see about it, an' that's all the good it did. I vum! I never see sich pesky varmint in all my life!"

Miss Mitchell smiled, serene in the conviction that her boys were innocent.

"I am very sure none of the pupils were there," she said. "I spoke to them about it the other time

you were here, and they all understood they were to keep away."

"Highty! tighty! indeed!" the little man hopped like a jumping-jack. "Mebbe they did *understand* it, but it's little heed they paid to it. Didn't I see the rascal with my own eyes, makin' tracks for the school? If I'd a been a bit quicker I'd a-caught him an' whaled him well, I tell you!"

Still incredulous, Miss Mitchell turned to the listening pupils. "Boys," she said, "I think none of you would disobey me. Did any of you go over in the field this morning?"

There was a sudden rustle of interest. Joe had risen and stood looking at the farmer with a mischievous smile.

"Guess I'm the one he means, Miss Mitchell," he drawled, but the smile faded at the sight of the real pain and surprise on her face.

"Ye dirty rascal!" the squire exclaimed, "I'll teach you go to botherin' where you had no right." He stepped towards the boy with his cane uplifted, but Jean interposed so quietly but decidedly that he paused.

"I will settle this, Mr. Bronton, please. May I ask why you disobeyed me, Joe?"

A mischievous twinkle came into the black eyes.

"Shall I tell the truth?" he asked.

"I expect nothing else."

The lad hesitated an instant.

"I didn't see any sense in your telling us not to go there," he said, slowly yet distinctly.

There was a little ripple of amazed consternation in the room, but Miss Mitchell took no notice of it. Turning to the farmer who was shaking his head in speechless indignation, she said very gravely:

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am, Mr. Bronton. Joe has no excuse, not even the poor one of forgetfulness. I shall certainly punish him. You may leave him to me."

"I s'pose so! I s'pose so! Schools ain't what they used to be. The children nowadays do about as they please. Parents an' teachers don't amount to anything. I tell you, though, I'll 'tend to him myself if I catch him there ag'in. Plague take the pesky boys!"

Muttering and groaning the angry squire went away, while the pupils waited with some curiosity to hear Joe's sentence. They were doomed to disappointment, however, for Miss Mitchell made no reference to what had happened, and the morning and afternoon sessions passed as usual. Joe alone was con-

scious of a subtle difference, a slight undercurrent which made him vaguely uncomfortable. At noon he took special pains to appeal to Miss Mitchell for her opinion on several matters. Her answers were given as pleasantly as usual, yet after three or four trials he subsided into silence. Somehow the "joke," as he had called it, of tramping through the field did not seem as funny as he had thought it at first.

The afternoon waned with no word of reference to what had occurred. Joe got his cap with the others. He felt surprised yet exultant, for he had not expected to escape so freely. But just as he reached the door, Miss Mitchell stopped him.

"I want you, Joe. Take your seat," she said. There was so much quiet firmness in her tones that the boy yielded to them as promptly as the angry farmer had done. The monitors finished their work and departed. They were alone in the school-room. For a long time, so it seemed to the boy, there was absolute silence. He glanced at Miss Mitchell now and then. She looked grave and troubled. At last she rose and came to his desk.

"You have disappointed me very much, Joe," she said. "You must apologize to Mr. Bronton for going into his field, and promise him never to do it again."

"He don't care, really," muttered Joe in hasty excuse. "It didn't hurt his wheat. I didn't step on any of it."

"You had no excuse for being in there after you had been forbidden to go."

"Well, I'll tell him I'll keep out after this. I'm not afraid of the old chap. He won't kill me, I guess."

Miss Mitchell's face was pale. She was very fond of the bright-faced boy before her. None the less was she determined that he should not repeat his experiment.

"That is not all, Joe," she said slowly. "You disobeyed me this morning deliberately and intentionally. I do not intend you to do so again. I am sorry, but I shall punish you very severely. You cannot go on the sleighride to-morrow night."

Joe sat in stunned silence. He had congratulated himself on his easy escape and the slight penalty imposed. The last sentence undeceived him. He looked up at Miss Mitchell's face. Its decision was unmistakable. Evidently appeal would be useless. Summoning all his pride to his assistance, he asked:

"May I go home now, Miss Mitchell?"

"Yes."

Her heart ached for the lad. She admired him,



LITTLE ONES SINGING THE SNOWFLAKE SONG.—*January.*

too, for the self-control, which was so new to him, yet she knew that the punishment was just, and common sense told her that if she showed him any leniency it would be misconstrued, not only by the other pupils but by the boy himself.

The next morning dawned clear and bright. The snow glittered in the sunshine like diamonds, and the children ran to school over the shining crust. They were all animated and excited. Little groups gathered around Miss Mitchell to talk over the sleighing party.

"It's going to be a splendid night. My father says so," Susie declared. "I've made some molasses candy. Do you think that will be nice?"

"I've sewed a banner and put 'The Morrisville School' on it," said Mary Manley, giving a little skip to express her happiness.

Joe came in at that moment. He looked somewhat shame-faced and subdued, but had a big bag full of red-cheeked apples.

"I went to 'Squire Bronton's last night, Miss Mitchell," he explained. "He's all right. He gave me these apples. Guess he's like me, a little mite peppy."

"Oh! keep them for tonight, Joe," cried half a dozen voices at once. "Ben can drive while you divide

them. That will keep your hands from getting cold, too."

Joe flushed hotly. "Guess Ben will have to do *all* the driving to-night," he said, trying to speak in an off-hand manner. "You can have the apples, and welcome, but I'm not going."

"Oh! Joe, why not?" The universal chorus was expressive of deep regret. Miss Mitchell would have spared him, but Joe's fault was not lack of courage.

"Can't," he said briefly. "Teacher won't let me."

The eager faces turned to her with pleading.

"Please, please, let Joe go."

Miss Mitchell found it hard to resist the entreaties which chimed with her own desires.

"I'm sorry," she said gently. "I want Joe with us, but I cannot let him go this time. We may go again if the snow lasts."

Joe frowned, his quick temper rising again.

"It wasn't such a terrible crime," he muttered. "Squire Bronton says himself he needn't have been so hasty. But I might have known you'd be as mean as could be about it."

"Joe!"

The boy paused, half afraid to say more. Then anger overmastered him again.

"I don't care," he said, recklessly. "I'm not going to try to be good any more. All a fellow gets is"——

"Joseph!" There was no mistaking the command in the firm tones. "Go to your seat at once."

The week that followed was a hard one for both Joe and Miss Mitchell. The boy seemingly cast every scruple to the wind. He sulked and scowled, was noisy and careless, and annoyed class and teacher in as many ways as he dared. Miss Mitchell was very firm but very patient. She knew that his pride had been deeply wounded. Many times in looking back she questioned her own wisdom, yet saw no other course. The sleighride was a thing of the past. It had been a great success and the pupils still talked of its joys, but Joe refused to be reconciled. One afternoon Jean felt unusually tired. She had been forced to detain the boy for some unfinished work, but a great longing came to her to be alone.

"Joe," she said. "You may go. I will not keep you this afternoon."

The boy glanced up quickly. Something in the weariness of the tones smote its way to his better feelings. He felt a stinging sensation of shame, a sudden desire to be once more on the old terms of

friendship with the quiet-voiced girl whom in his heart of hearts he both admired and respected. With Joe to feel was to act.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Forgive me."

Miss Mitchell smiled at him.

"All right, Joe," she said, patiently. "We'll start again."

The boy still lingered. He felt anxious to atone in some way for the discomfiture he had caused.

"May I help you with the work for to-morrow?"

"Not now, thank you. I'd rather not." Then, reading his disappointment she added gently, "It isn't because I am angry with you. I want to be alone. You don't mind, do you? You may help to-morrow."

"All right." The lad went out into the February twilight. As he passed the window he glanced in. The brown head was bowed on the desk as if in utter weariness. The pretty color had faded from Jean's cheeks. The sight was too much for Joe's warm heart. Pushing the door open he went in quickly. Miss Mitchell started at the sound of his entrance.

"You—again?" she asked with evident disapproval, but Joe blurted out:

"I saw you through the window, Miss Mitchell. Are you—are you feeling sorry about *me*?"

Jean hesitated. She had wanted to be alone to indulge in a quiet melancholy reverie. It had seemed to her that she *must* sit for a little while in the lonely gray twilight to brood over her own loneliness, but the real regret on the boy's countenance touched her, and with the unselfishness which was fast becoming habitual, she roused herself from her abstraction, saying kindly:

"It wasn't you alone, Joe. I've been having 'the blues' all the week. You see, Tuesday was my mother's birthday and we always made so much of it at home. It was the first time I had ever been away from her on that day, so naturally I felt a little homesick. It's all right now."

"I've been horrid all the week and made you worry, too."

Miss Mitchell waited an instant before replying.

"Well, Joe, to be honest, you have troubled me a great deal. I felt hurt to think you would disobey me deliberately, and then when I had to punish you it made me very sorry. I'm sometimes afraid I don't know how to manage you."

"Why! you do. You make me mind," was the eager answer.

In spite of herself Jean could not help smiling at this statement.

"How? I tell you not to go to a certain place, and you straightway go there?"

"Hum! But I got more than I wanted for that. You don't know how much I thought of that sleigh-ride. I'd have kept out of the old field if I'd known what would happen. It just seemed like fun at first."

"I like fun, too, but not the kind that is forbidden. You must obey me whether you see the reason or not. I don't want to be cross, but I shall not excuse you when you are in fault."

"I s'pose you don't like me any more?"

"I like you very much, Joe."

"Well, I like you, too, lots. I won't disobey you again. I'm better for you than I ever was for anybody else. But I'm a pretty bad soldier even when I'm good."

"We all feel that truth sometimes," Miss Mitchell answered, the boy's quaint expression finding an echo in her own heart. "I do, very often. The only thing we can do is to keep on trying as hard as we can, remembering that God, the great Captain, is very patient with His poor soldiers. I think we understand each other, Joe. Now, if you will take an eraser, I'll find another and we'll see who can clean the boards first."

Joe went to work with energy, shaking himself

slightly as if to get rid of the unwonted gravity he had felt. They went down the road together afterwards, two light-hearted friends, chatting gayly. Jean wondered what had become of her own gloomy feelings, not realizing that she had taken the most effectual means to dispel them when she tried to help someone else.

As for Joe, he was apparently the same high-spirited, careless fellow he had always been. No one but the great Captain Himself knew that the few earnest words had appealed to the depths of a really noble nature and awakened in the boy new ideals of life and character.



CHAPTER XIII.

THREE BIRTHDAYS.

AS an introduction to the story of Washington, Miss Mitchell taught the older pupils some lines from Lowell's poem on our first President. Stately lines they were and rich in thought. Many teachers would have hesitated to give them to a class, lest they might have been above their comprehension, but Jean knew the fascination of perfect rhythm and made the meaning so clear that each child liked to quote them.

"Haughty, they said he was at first; severe;
Yet owned, as all men own, the steady hand
Upon the bridle, patient to command.
Prized, as all prize, the justice pure from fear,
And learned to honor first, then love him and revere.

* * * * *

Not honored then or now because he wooed
The popular voice, but that he still withstood.
Broad-minded, higher-souled, there is but one
Who was all this and ours, and all men's,—Washington."

They were much interested to know that Lowell had been born on the same day as Washington, although many years later. Some of Lowell's shorter poems were familiar to them from their other lessons, so Miss Mitchell read them the beautiful words of "The Fountain," and told them of the poet's great love for nature.

Ben found the poem of "The Heritage" in an old magazine. Its force and vigor pleased him, so he brought it to school.

"It's a fine thing," he said with decision. "And there's a good bit of truth in it. Like enough Mr. Lowell knowed two fellows like what he wrote about. I guess he just happened to see them passing along the street together, and noticed the difference. Poets have pretty good eyes, haven't they?"

"Ho! Some of them are *blind*," Joe said scornfully.

Ben meditated. "I don't mean just that," he remarked at last. "I mean that the eyes of their mind

are sharp. And Mr. Lowell's were really remarkable, don't you think so, Miss Mitchell?"

Jean assented, a little amused at the odd compliment.

All the boys and girls listened with ever-increasing love and admiration to the anecdotes of Washington's youth and manhood.

George Washington, the boy! Miss Mitchell could not tell enough about him. The children gloried in his honesty and bravery, making him the ideal for their own conduct. Borders of hatchets and cherries ornamented all the written work in language and number, while the "babies" delighted to enact the cherry tree drama. The school-house itself was regarded with added pride, for had not both Washington and Lincoln attended country schools?

Miss Mitchell possessed the invaluable gift of story telling. She knew instinctively just what would be of interest and value. Facts which looked dull and dry in the bare language of the text-books flashed into sudden beauty beneath her magic touch. The throbbing life of the past, the hopes and fears that had once thrilled the hearts of those long passed away, became a living reality, enriching the boys and girls who heard of them.

In fancy they saw the low-roofed farmhouse in Virginia surrounded by fields and forests. They saw the mother's tender care for her children, noticed how strong and manly the boy George became, and how he tried to be brave and truthful, even when in fault, that he might please his mother.

They liked to hear of his experiences as a surveyor camping out under the blue sky, followed with glowing interest his dangerous journey with his message from Governor Dinwiddie, and went with him through the exciting months and years of the French and Indian War. Miss Mitchell made him seem so life-like that her audience really felt the presence of the tall young soldier in his Indian costume.

"He was a cute one, too," Ben declared with enthusiasm. "There ain't many that would have thought of fighting in the Indian way, like he done,—did, I mean."

Jean told of his return to his home at Mt. Vernon with his young wife Martha, and then described the events leading to the American Revolution. Patriotism burned at a white heat during this recital. One picture after another rose before them, living pictures, painted with graphic power on the canvas of the past;—Washington, made commander-in-chief of the

American army, suffering with his soldiers in the dreary winter at Valley Forge, leading his troops into battle after earnest prayer, and then, when the war was over and victory had been won, chosen by the people to be the first president of the United States. How they exulted in his success as soldier and statesman! How pleased they were to know that it was he who first originated our flag! And with what joy the first and second grade children cut five-pointed stars just as Betsey Ross had done so long ago.

Frank voiced the general sentiment when he said, thoughtfully:

"This country ought to be good as well as great, for so many good men and women have lived in it and worked for it."

The last week of the month was spent in the study of Longfellow. A portrait of that gentle poet hung in the front of the room. The higher grades had already read *Evangeline*. *The Village Blacksmith*, *The Children's Hour*, *Snow-flakes*, *Aftermath*, *The Fire of Driftwood*, *The Old Clock on the Stairs*, and other simple yet exquisite poems were now presented so sympathetically that even the youngest children felt the charm of their melody and saw the picture each described.

The sand-table became the center of attraction again, in the thrilling scenes of Hiawatha.

Under its dark forest trees a broad piece of looking-glass represented the shining "Big-Sea-Water." There on its margin stood the wigwam of Nokomis, with the Indian village close by. There little Hiawatha's cradle hung from the birch tree; there the whole simple drama of primitive life was enacted. Miss Mitchell selected the most striking portions of the poem to illustrate; Hiawatha's childhood, the smoking of the Peace Pipe, the wrestling with Mudjekeewis, the gift of corn, Hiawatha's friends, the making of the birch canoe, the home-bringing of Minnehaha, mischievous Pau-puk-keewis, the famine, the death of Minnehaha, the coming of the white men with their message from the Great Spirit, and the departure of Hiawatha.

The horizon of the children's thought was thus immeasurably widened. They learned to appreciate the conveniences of their own homes by contrasting them with the rude contrivances of former days, while for many of them the rustle of the wind among the trees would be forever linked with the music of the poems learned in school.

The February calendar expressed the patriotic spirit of the month, for the Stars and Stripes waved

above it, while below at the side of a sketch of the ice-bound river were the words of the song, which was sung to the tune of *Marching Through Georgia*.

OUR FLAG.

Hail the starry banner, shining pure and clear and
bright.

Ever may its colors gleam to catch the morning light!
Proudly may it glimmer through the gloom and dusk
of night,

Guarding our country forever.

CHORUS.

Hurrah! Hurrah! We love it more and more,
Hurrah! Hurrah! We sing it o'er and o'er;
From the deep Atlantic to Pacific's golden shore
Hail to that bright flag forever!

So unfurl the banner fair beneath the smiling sky,
East and West and North and South, to flutter proud
and high,
Gleaming brighter as the years go marching swiftly
by,

Hail to that bright flag forever!

Flag of freedom and of right, wherever we may be.
May thy loyal children's hearts be ever true to thee!
May the God of nations keep thy folds unsullied, free,
Guarding a free land forever!



CHAPTER XIV.

MARCH WINDS.

IT was the first week of March. The white drifts still lingered here and there along the road, but the buds of the willows and maples had begun to swell, and a few herald honey bees went humming over the bare fields.

At the end of January the children had gathered long twigs and branches from the naked trees. These had been put in water. In March the warm air of the school-room caused them to open their blossoms, and the fragrance of apple, cherry, pear, plum and peach blooms brought their message of spring while the unfolding flowers were a constant revelation of beauty.

The red alders were beginning to hang out their

tassels. From swampy places in the woods the skunk cabbages lifted hoods of red, purple, yellow and green. Ben brought some twigs of the horse-chestnut that the children might notice the curious horse-shoes made by the leaf-scars on the stems, and watch the fuzzy leaves emerging like fingers from their warm winter wrappings. He had only a few days left and considered each moment precious.

Almost all the plants in the big box of earth had blossomed and gone to seed, but a few violets still nestled shyly among their green leaves, and the fronds of new ferns were gracefully uncurling.

The March winds whistled around the little school-house, making it fairly rock at times, and then they all liked to watch the last withered leaves that had hung from the trees all winter go whirling downward to make room for the new verdure that would soon appear. Sometimes the icy rain dashed and beat upon the roof. Now and then there was a slight flurry of snow, but every day the sun lingered longer and longer in the warm hollows.

Jean hung a glass prism in one of the sunniest windows. None of the little children had ever seen one before, and there were many exclamations of delight over the rainbow which danced on floor and walls.

"It's dust a-zzackly lit̄ a fairy bird," Dorothy said.

Tiny hands flitted hither and thither trying in vain to catch the brilliant reflection. Paper windows folded for busy work were held in its brightness at noon, so that they might become "stained glass." Rainbows made of colored paper were pasted on white cards and hung around the room, making dazzling bits of color on "gray" days.

"The winds are like brownies," Miss Mitchell said, as they all stood watching while the trees bent and swayed in a fierce gale. "They are getting everything ready for spring as they work so hard. Nobody sees them, but we can see what they have been doing. They've carried away almost all the old dead leaves and the seeds which the birds and squirrels have left."

"They make trees grow, too," said Freddie, wisely.

"Do winds help things to grow?" and Retta surveyed him with respectful wonder.

"Yes, they do," Freddie's tones were emphatic. "And I can prove it. Last fall when we all went for nuts I saw a little squirrel drop a hick'ry nut out of his mouth while he was running up a tree. I picked it up and showed it to Miss Mitchell, and she said.

'S'posing you put it down under the tree and look ev-ry day and see if the squirrel ever finds it again.' So I did. And I called up to the little fellow, 'Little squirrel, here's your nut down here,' but of course I don't know squirrel talk, so he never knowed what I said. And every day I looked and there lay the nut yet. By and by all the leaves came down. Then I put a stick in by the nut to mark the place, and the wind blowed and piled the leaves all over it. Then the snow came and hid it, and just yesterday I went down there and looked and found it covered with earth. It's all ready to grow soon's the warm days come. It was the wind that covered it up and kept it warm, so it's a good helper to the trees. Fact is, I don't know what-ever they'd do without it."

Everybody laughed, for Freddie's voice was so appreciative.

"What are brownies?" Harold asked, and Miss Mitchell told the story of the merry little men who work so quietly. This amused them very much, especially when she drew some bright-eyed little fellows on the board, engaged in various funny yet helpful pranks. Often afterwards she would find that the school-room had been dusted by unseen hands, the plants watered, an apple or orange put on her desk,

or some other small surprise arranged in silence, and to her inquiries about the worker would receive the laughing answer, "Some brownie must have been around."

The children had never grown tired of the "Smith family." Their adventures were as entertaining as ever. In January, Miss Mitchell told them that Mr. Smith had sold his farm and taken his family to Vermont to live among the mountains. How many lessons in geography were learned incidentally on that journey? What busy, happy times the pupils in the middle classes had as they found out how much it cost to build his new house, plastering, painting, brick-laying, etc. They were desirous of knowing the cost of furnishing it afterwards, so Miss Mitchell showed them how to draw diagrams of the various rooms, giving their different dimensions. Carpets and paper were bought in imagination. It was only fun to make out bills for furniture, and the young business men and women took great pride in the length and neatness of these accounts. Sandy Duncan supplied the pupils with three or four catalogues from various furniture dealers in a neighboring city. Then, moved by most unusual public spirit, he presented each boy and girl with a five-cent blank book in which the accounts

might be kept. To show proper appreciation for this munificent gift, Jean let them rule all the lines and enter the balances with red ink. This threw an added glamour over the occupation and Sandy acknowledged that the majority of the books were kept more neatly than were his own.

In March, Jean let the little ones learn of the delights of a sugar-camp, as they pictured Bessie and the other Smith children amid its pleasures. They built a little log house on the sand-table in the "sugar woods," as Gussie called them, tapped the twigs which served for maple trees, boiled the sap over imaginary fires, and then put the hot syrup away in shallow pans to cool.

Harold laughed when he saw the pans which Miss Mitchell provided for the purpose.

"They're pretty big," he said, gazing first at the two-inch kettle that Jessie had lent from her kitchen set, then at the big baking tins. "We might have folded some paper ones, if we'd thought. These are as big as the woods themselves."

"I think you will not find them any too large tomorrow," Jean replied, a mysterious sentence which made the small boy meditate deeply.

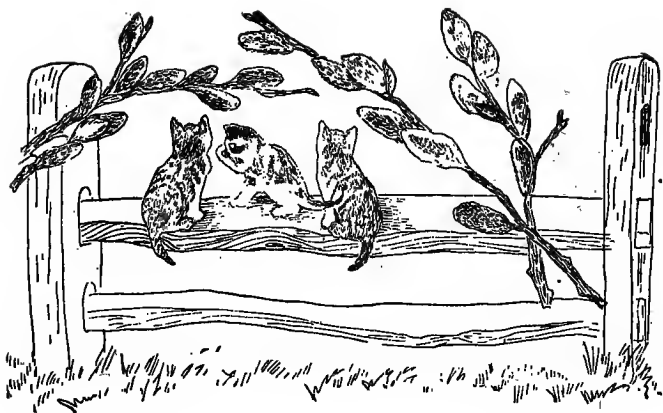
Next morning, however, what was the glee to find

them full of genuine maple sugar, brown and moist and rich! It had come from Newton, near which place there was a sugar-camp. How the bright eyes danced over the discovery, and how proud the little ones were to treat the school! There was plenty for all and no one slighted the delicacy.

"Well, did you find the pans *much* too large, Harold?" Jean asked mischievously.

Harold solemnly swallowed the last delicious morsel, then answered with heartfelt conviction;

"I don't know where that sugar came from. The brownies must have been around in the night, a-tippy-toein' across this room, an' I'm glad they didn't find little paper pans 'stead o' your nice big ones!"



CHAPTER XV.

PUSSY WILLOWS.

BEFORE the end of March the pussy-willows had peeped out in their silver furs. Everyone was glad to see them, for they seemed to say, "Spring is really here." Miss Mitchell held one of the sprays and drew the soft little gray things gently over her soft cheeks.

"The 'pussies' remind me of something I once saw," she said. "After morning exercises, I'll tell you about it. It is a sweet story, although a very simple one."

The boys and girls did not fail to remind her of this promise, so after the morning talk, she began :

You all know that my home is in Newton. There is a hospital there which has one room kept especially for sick children. When I was at home I liked to go to the building to visit them. They were always glad to see any visitor, for the days seemed long and dreary to them as they lay on their small white beds sometimes suffering great pain.

There was one little boy whose name was Joe; "Joey" everyone called him. He had black eyes like yours, Joe, and his hair was short and curly. He had been a newsboy. One day while selling his papers he saw a tiny child trying to cross the crowded street almost under the feet of some runaway horses. He flew to her rescue, and saved the girl, but was knocked down himself and the great horses trampled over him.

Someone picked him up and carried him to the hospital, and there I first knew him. We became great friends. Everybody was very fond of the bright, patient little fellow who was always pleasant even when suffering the most. He loved music and would often beg me to sing his favorite songs and hymns. Best of all, I think he liked our own national hymn, "My country, 'tis of thee." We

always "wound up" with that and all the children would join in, Joe's shrill little voice louder than the rest, and his thin, brown hands keeping time to the music.

One morning I had taken a long walk in the woods. Returning I saw one long branch of pussy willows with their silver tips gleaming in the sunshine. I was on my way to the hospital and the thought came to me that perhaps Joey would like to see the pretty gray catkins. I knew he was very ill, for the nurse had told me so the day before.

When I went in the room was very quiet. The sun shining through the windows lay in great patches across the clean, bare floor. All the tiny white beds had been freshly made, so that they looked as neat and tidy as possible. Joey's eyes were closed, but he opened them when I put the long twig down on his pillow.

"Oh! how pretty!" he cried. "What are they, Miss Mitchell? I never saw anything like them before."

"They are pussy willows," I answered.

The little fellow stroked them gently.

"Such funny gray pussies!" he said. "Each one's climbin' up the stem. It's my birthday to-day an' it's the first time I ever got a present. Do you mind if I

give all the children a cunning little pussy for their own?"

"No, indeed," I replied, so the little fellow broke off one silver bud after another and I passed them around as he directed.

It didn't take much to make the whole roomful happy. Such gentle little mews and purrs as went up from the children while they cuddled the "pussies!" There were just enough to go around, and Joey insisted that I should keep one, too.

"It's my birthday party," he said gayly, putting the cool gray catkin close to his hot cheek. "An' I've got a present for everybody."

He was getting tired by that time, so I said I would have to go.

"You'll sing *My Country* first, won't you?" he asked. We all sang the words he loved so much and then I went away.

The next day the small white bed was empty. Joey had gone to a fairer country than this, but I still keep the tiny gift among my treasures, and whenever I see the fairy catkins they remind me of that bright, unselfish little lad.

Jean's voice trembled a little and even Frank was not ashamed that there were tears in his eyes.

"Why can't we send a lot of pussy willow twigs down there?" Joe asked, impetuously. "We could put them in a box. And why not write a budget of letters to go with them?"

This suggestion coming from Joe, who disliked composition more than any other lesson, pleased Miss Mitchell very much. She let them carry out the plan. The results were characteristic and she smiled and sighed as she read the letters that evening.

"Dear Hospittle Children," Joe had written with lofty disregard for spelling. "Our teacher, Miss Mitchell, has been telling us about you, how you have to lie in bed all day and can't run or play or have fun like we can. I'm real sorry for you. I wish I could do something to help you or cheer you up a bit. I liked to hear Miss Mitchell tell about a boy she knew who was sick in the Hospittle where you are. His name was Joe. That's my name, too, but I ain't as good as he was, and I'm afraid I never will be, for I get mad as easy as can be. If there is any boy or girl in the Hospittle with a quick temper they must try hard not to be bad. We are going to send you a lot of pussy willows to make you laugh. Miss Mitchell drawed a—drew a picture of



WRITING LETTERS TO THE HOSPITAL CHILDREN.—*March.*



little cats squirming up a stem like this. Mine isn't a very nice picture, for I can play ball better than I can draw. Miss Mitchell is a jolly teacher and we all like her. I do, first-rate. With kind remembrances,

Yours respectfully,

JOE MARTIN."

Ben's letter also contained some good advice.

"Boys and girls in the Hospital, I took a good deal of interest this morning in hearing some putticklers about you. I am attending the Morrisville school. We have good times. Our teacher often tells us stories and she did so to-day, which was about you. I guess you didn't think while you were lying there that somebody here was writing to you. I am going to be a doctor some day. Maybe then I will come to see you and try to give you medicine to take away your pain. I hope you mind all the doctors say. You want to be careful of your health, for when you are young or old it is a very important thing. This is almost the last day I will be at school, for I work for a farmer. There is so much work to do that he can only let me go to school for a few months. I have learnt a great deal this year. These pussy willows grew by the school-house. They are like messengers sent on to tell us spring is coming.

They make me glad and sorry, too, for I like summer, but like school better yet. You must not mind taking medicine, for it will help you to get well and strong.

Good-bye,

BEN."

The big box was carefully packed and went safely to its destination. Soon an answer came from one of the nurses written on behalf of the children, thanking the pupils for their kindness. The interest thus awakened did not wane, but deepened as the months passed and several boxes of spring flowers, opening leaves, etc., were sent as the season advanced, making the children's sympathies broader and deeper.

Jean helped the little ones to make dainty mementoes of the season. On long white cards they painted an old gray fence with a few blades of green grass below it, then on the top of the fence drew three tiny kittens with their tails hanging down. Pussy willow catkins were then carefully cut lengthwise into halves and pasted on the cards for bodies, so that the small round heads and pointed ears rose above them in a very realistic manner. At the top of the card they printed:

Who will sing a song of spring?
Pussy will-oh! (willow.)

The last day of the month was Ben's last day at

school. The lad looked rather wistful, Miss Mitchell fancied. At noon they had a good long talk together, the other pupils considerately leaving them alone for the purpose. Jean marked out a course of study for him in his spare moments and urged him to come to her for help at any time.

"I shall miss you very much, Ben," she said. "You have helped me in many ways, oftener, perhaps, than you ever dreamed of doing. It will be a pleasure to assist you, if I can."

Ben thanked her, his voice full of earnestness.

"These three months have meant a great deal to me. I don't know how to say what I feel, but you know how much I like you and how kind I think you are."

He was very quiet all the afternoon. Joe asked if they might spend the last half-hour in "singing the pieces Ben likes best."

"The poor old chap won't hear them again for a long time," he added.

"It is a very pleasant thought," Miss Mitchell answered. "But, unfortunately, I have a cold and cannot lead the singing. If you think you can get along without me I shall be glad to listen and I'm sure Ben will be pleased."

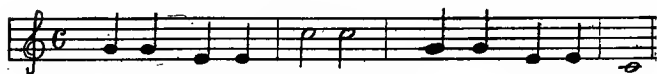
So the last half-hour was spent in Ben's honor and the pupils sang all the songs he chose. The tunes were started somewhat feebly as first, but suddenly a new voice took the lead. Miss Mitchell listened in surprise. It was Harry Stevens who was singing. Clear and sweet and true the beautiful notes rang out. Jean had not suspected that the boy had it in him. She had never heard him sing before, but recognized that his voice was really unusual in its power and beauty. After a moment's astonished silence the school joined in the triumphant strains.

"You have a beautiful voice, Harry," she said, heartily, but the boy flushed and looked so uncomfortable that she refrained from any further remark.

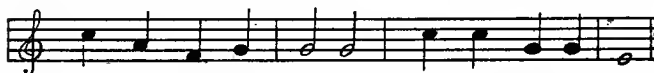
Amid a chorus of good wishes Ben said good-bye and went away with many happy memories to brighten his lonely life.

"March is ended. Only three more months of school remain," Miss Mitchell thought as she, too, walked homeward, keeping step unconsciously to the music of the March song that had been one of those liked best by the children.

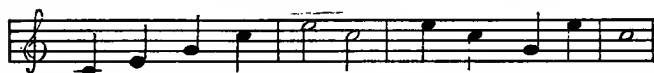
MARCH WINDS.



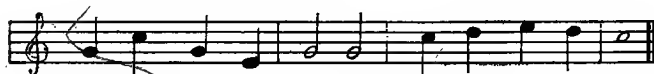
Hear the March winds blowing, whistling loud and shrill,



O'er the leafless forest, over field and hill.



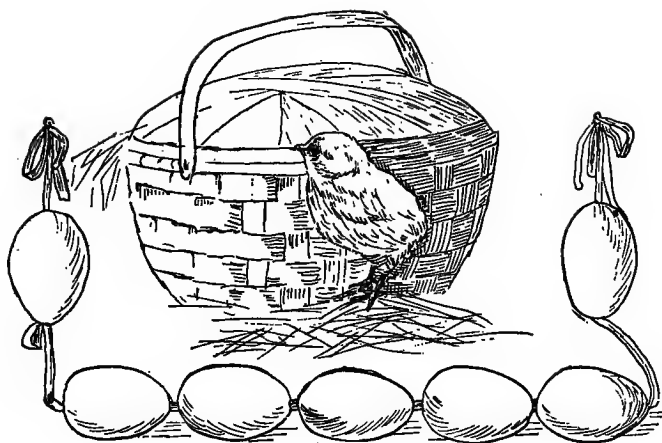
Mighty trumpets calling, "Winter cannot stay!



Sleeping leaves and flowers, Spring is on her way!"

Catkins of the willow
 Show their silver fur,
 Maple buds are crimson,
 Alder tassels stir.
 All the hosts of springtime
 Hear that ringing call,
 Answ'ring to the summons
 Into line they fall.

Soon the birds will carol,
All the air will ring
With the merry music
Of returning spring.
Hear the mighty trumpets!
"Winter cannot stay!
Waken, leaves and flowers,
Spring is on her way!"



CHAPTER XVI.

APRIL DAYS.

THE first warm sunny days of April had come. All the farmers were busy ploughing. The fields began to show borders of green grass and every tree and shrub seemed to stir with new life. The children watched eagerly for the first birds, hailing their arrival with joy and recording the dates in one corner of the blackboard where Jean had written, "Bird and Flower Friends."

A glass globe containing tadpoles, whirligig beetles and a few minnows furnished many delightful lessons. The sand-table was marked off into fields, and corn, beans and peas were sown in even rows, that the process of germination might be observed. Joe brought a sweet potato that had sprouted a little. This was put in a glass of water and in a short time sent out a profusion of graceful trailing green vines.

One morning Dorothy came to school carrying a basket which she held very carefully.

"You tan't guess what is in it," she said proudly. "An' nobody tan't see till Mif Mitchell tomes."

The children guessed everything they could think of, apples, candy, nuts, seeds, etc., but at each guess Dorothy shook her curly head.

"You tan't guess, so don't etcite yourselves. Soon as Mif Mitchell tomes I'll show you."

Curiosity was at high tide when the teacher appeared.

"Somefin' for you," Dorothy announced, presenting the basket with her best bow. "You must guess what's in it first. It's a little visitor an' my muvver sent it wif her best compliments."

"Thank you, Dorothy. I must guess before I look, must I? Well, I think it is a kitty."

"No'm! No'm! It's dot yellow legs an' black eyes an' a sharp little bill."

"A bird!" cried Joe.

"A chicken," said solemn Gretchen.

Miss Mitchell lifted the lid. Out on the desk stepped the fluffiest, downiest, tiniest yellow chicken, as round as a ball. Balancing itself on its unsteady legs the little thing looked around with its black eyes and said loudly, "Peep! peep!"

Everyone laughed and the wee visitor was treated with the greatest consideration. The big boys stroked its fuzzy head with the utmost gentleness. It was not at all afraid, but surveyed the new world with an unwinking stare.

"You'll make a reading lesson about it, won't you, Miss Mitchell?" Harold begged.

So the reading and language lessons for the younger ones centered around "Peepsie," as the children named the little stranger.

"Would you like to make a picture of Peepsie to take home to show your mothers?" Jean asked the little children.

Delightful suggestion! A yellow circle was pasted on a white card for the body, a smaller circle slipped a little under the top of the larger one formed the

head, yellow legs and feet were added, a tiny triangle made the bill, a black dot represented his eye, and the result was a very life-like chicken. On another card the children wrote the story of "How Peepsie Came to School." Miss Mitchell helped them with the spelling, writing on the board any word that they wished to know. Some of the little stories were well-written and nicely worded. Dorothy's was one of the best.

"This dear little chicken is Peepsie.

"He is my chicken.

"My mamma said I could take him to school.

"He would be a little visitor.

"When Miss Mitchell opened the basket the funny fellow said, Peep, peep (Good morning, good morning).

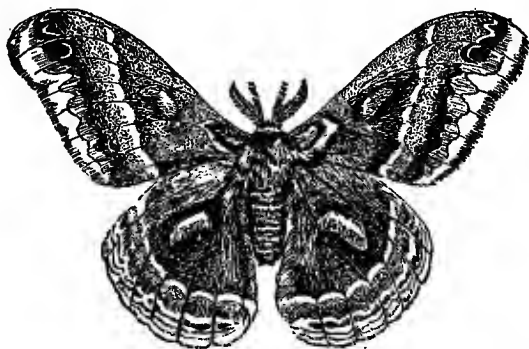
"He had never been at school before.

"His mamma is an old black hen.

"She wonders where he is, but she will be surprised when he gets home."

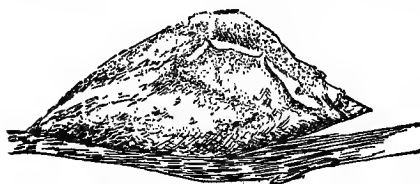
"She will be surprised because her baby went to school."

Not many days after that the whole school had a beautiful experience. The cocoons which had been kept all winter had so far given no signs of life. Jean watched them closely, hoping that the boys and girls



might see the unveiling of the wonderful mystery they contained. At last her patience was rewarded.

One of the large cocoons began to roll around in the box. The life within it quivered and stirred and



beat against its prison walls. Jean put it on a large box-lid and let the pupils watch. The

interest was breathless. For half an hour intense silence reigned. Every eye was fixed on the cocoon. At last the creature within it made its way out. It lay quiet for a few moments, slowly unfurling its folded sails. Then a deep sigh of admiration rose from the school as a splendid moth spread its beautiful wings, brown and black with velvety crimson spots, and fluttered straight to the flowers in the window.

Jean was satisfied. Her pupils had lost an arithmetic lesson, but they had gained a revelation never to be forgotten. She spoke no word of comment. The wonder and awe which all felt were written plainly enough on their faces. Harry turned his eyes away quickly, as if ashamed of the interest he had manifested. Jean could not help wondering what he really thought. He was constantly in her mind. She knew that the other pupils regarded her as a friend. As she glanced over the school-room each day she could not but feel the genuine love felt for her by the young hearts. There was Joe, the hasty, impulsive, quick-tempered lad who struggled so bravely with his faults, who responded to the slightest glance of reproof, and was so anxious to be all that she wished. There was Evelyn, to whom she had brought as much cheer and sunshine as possible and who in her abrupt reserved way was truly grateful. Careless Jake, too, did he not make greater effort with his work? And was not Jack more gentle and patient with others than he had ever been before?

It was Harry alone whom she had not helped in any way. He, and he only, remained untouched by her influence. Looking back, it seemed to her that she had done her utmost without the slightest result.

There were days when she fancied that he liked her and tried to please her, but it was impossible to be sure. He was never frank like the other pupils. There was his singing, for instance. He must have been conscious of the exquisite beauty of his voice, yet he had told her time after time that he could not sing and cared nothing for music. If he took any pleasure in her praise or in the unfeigned admiration of his school-mates since their discovery of his gift he concealed it most artfully.

“He’s a queer fellow,” Joe had said more than once. Miss Mitchell echoed the words in her own mind, adding with sincere pity, “Poor boy, I wish I knew how to reach him, but I’m afraid I’m not wise enough.”

As Easter drew near the smaller children were very fond of modeling clay eggs. They put a hole through the middle, painted the outside with pretty shades of pink, blue, yellow or green, then strung them on cords or baby ribbon. These made pretty gifts and decorations for the room.

Miss Mitchell was often amused by the admiration with which the big boys viewed the younger children’s manufactures. Some of the things which she considered almost too childish appealed to them the most,

and at noon they would coax her to show them how to make each little article.

"You know we like pretty things, too," Joe would say in his whimsical way. "We're not too big, are we?" and then the big clumsy fingers would fumble with the pretty papers or dainty paints, while their owners became imbued with a new respect for the smaller ones who could do the work more neatly.

One Friday in April, Miss Mitchell planned a surprise for the noon hour. The drawing classes had been constructing pasteboard boxes of various shapes. The results were really creditable, so she said on Thursday:

"To-morrow noon we'll have a hunt for eggs. You may use these boxes to put them in, and you'll find them all around the room."

"Around this room?" asked Gretchen in incredulous tones.

"Yes, this very room. You're all invited. Perhaps the big boys and girls will think they are too large," and Jean smiled. "If they do, they needn't accept."

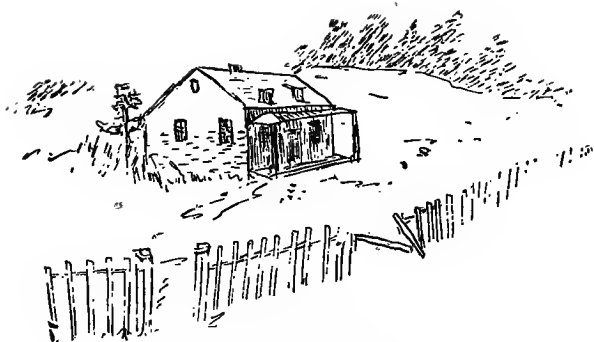
"Guess we'll be on hand," said Joe. "Do you mean *real* eggs, Miss Mitchell?"

"Wait and see." was all Jean would answer.

The next noon she gave each pupil his or her own box, laughingly turned them out of the room, pulled the curtains down, and bade them wait until she rang the bell.

The welcome signal soon sounded, and in a moment the room rang with light-hearted laughter, for tiny candy eggs had been hidden in various places, and the search for them proved very amusing.

The surprise had not cost much nor taken much time, but it had certainly given great enjoyment, and as pupils and teacher ate their lunch together afterwards, Miss Mitchell knew that the kind thought had brought them into closer sympathy.



CHAPTER XVII.

ELLEN.



ONE of the Jones children have been at school for the last two days," Jean thought one April afternoon. "I suppose one of them is sick or has no shoes, and so the whole family stays home to mourn. Perhaps I'd better call there while I have time."

The Jones family lived about two miles from the school-house. They were "lazy, easy-going people, too stupid to go in out of the rain," so Mr. Martin said. The thrifty farmers of the neighborhood despised them for their idle habits. Five of the children came to school, or as Jean described it, "stayed at home," for they were rarely all present, some of their

number being always in need of some article of clothing. The mother and the eldest daughter, Ellen, seemed to be the only ones who had any sense of responsibility. Mr. Jones and the other children took life as it came, treating privation as a kind of joke.

Ellen was a small thin girl, with weak eyes, and pale, tow-colored hair, braided in a tight "pig-tail." There was nothing at all attractive about her. Miss Mitchell had often wondered at her shrewd quickness and tried to conceal the dislike she felt for her queer ways. The child was never still for a moment. Seemingly strung on wires, she was the embodiment of nervous energy, while her pinched little face wore a constant expression of inquiry.

Miss Mitchell hummed softly as she walked along in the spring sunshine. The Jones farm-house looked as dreary and forlorn as ever. Bundles of old clothes protruded from the broken windows, the palings hung and flapped in the wind, while the front yard was littered with every kind of rubbish. Only one thing seemed different from usual. There were no noisy children quarreling or playing in the yard.

As Jean drew nearer she saw a slender string of white crape hanging from the front door, with two or three green leaves above it. Somehow the pitiful

little emblem of sorrow lent a touch of dignity to the desolate place. Jean's humming ceased. With a reverent hand she lifted the old-fashioned knocker. In a moment Ellen appeared, her eyes redder than ever.

"Oh! Miss Mitchell!" she cried, clinging convulsively to her teacher. "The baby's dead. You remember her, don't you? She came to the Christmas tree and you gave her a doll."

Jean recalled the child in a moment; a dark-eyed, dimpled little two-year-old, who had seemed like a lost spirit among her rougher brothers and sisters.

The baby lay in her simple white casket, so peaceful and smiling that she seemed only sleeping. The dark eyes were closed, but the long lashes rested on the waxen cheeks and the tiny dimpled fingers tightly clasped the beloved doll that had been her favorite plaything.

While Ellen went to call her mother, Jean stood looking down at the sweet child face. The great mystery of death came home to her as it had never done before; death, majestic and solemn even in the midst of the most tawdry surroundings.

Mrs. Jones came in, fumbling her apron nervously in her wrinkled hands. Her eyes were tearless, but there was a hard look in them that filled Miss Mitch-

ell's heart with pity. Ellen sobbed as she pointed to the doll.

"She was so proud of it," she said brokenly. "Things get so mussed up here, and the poor doll did, too, but it was always just as dear to Maysie. Just the day before she got sick she was rocking it to sleep and singing the little hushaby song you taught the children at school, and when I kissed her she said, 'Isn't her a dear, dear dolly, Elly?' just as cunning as anything. Didn't she, mother?"

"Yes," was the brief answer.

"I remember how pretty she looked at Christmas," Jean said softly, "and how proud you all were of her. You may be proud of Ellen, too, Mrs. Jones, for she is a good girl."

The mother's eyes turned to her with sudden softening. Tears which had not fallen for the dead baby came at thought of the helpfulness and patience of the older girl.

"Elly's my only comfort," she said. "Always ready an' cheerful, thinkin' how to help with the other children. Maysie loved her as well as she did me. She sets great store by you, ma'am. Sometimes when she comes home from the school at night she tries to cheer me up a bit, an' it's always you she talks about.

Nobody ever bothered much with her before. There's nothin' she wouldn't do for you, especially after you give Maysie the present at Christmas. 'There ain't nobody like my teacher,' she says over an' over."

Miss Mitchell smiled at the thin, flushed face, remembering with a pang of regret a few times when she had been impatient with the child. With a new impulse of tenderness she bent over and kissed her. Mrs. Jones regarded the two with a wistful expression.

"Elly sets great stock by such affectionate ways," she said slowly. "She never gets them at home. I haven't the time nor the heart for 'em. Maysie used to coax me to pet *her* an' I wish now I'd done it oftener. But there's no use in wishin', for she's gone forever. Oh! Miss Mitchell, my baby! my baby!"

Jean realized in part the bitterness of self-reproach which tore the mother's heart. As simply and gently as possible she spoke of the Good Shepherd who had taken the little lamb into His own keeping, until at last the poor woman wiped away her tears with fresh courage for the duties crowding upon her.

Miss Mitchell went home slowly, filled with a deeper spirit of patience and sympathy than she had ever possessed before. Having once realized the innate nobility of Ellen's nature, she was no longer an-

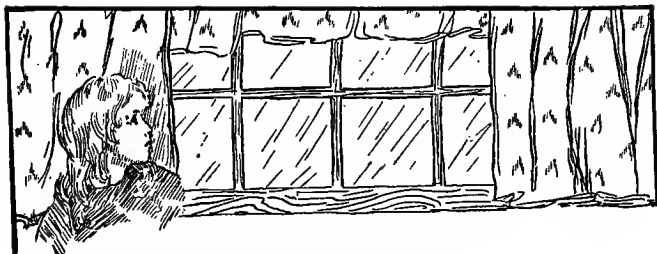
noyed by her nervous actions. Seeing how much value the child placed on her affection, she manifested it often, sometimes by a word, a touch, or a smile, and Ellen's character expanded under the genial influence like a flower in the sunshine.

"I love you, Miss Mitchell," she would whisper as the teacher passed her at recess. The gentle voice would be no louder than a zephyr's breath, and the slightest discouragement would have caused her to become self-conscious and embarrassed. But Jean was never too busy to heed and answer.



Easter came the middle of April that year. The first week of the month there had been many sketches on the black-board; sketches of cunning, fluffy chickens and proud mother hens, of branches showing their opening leaf-buds, birds returning from the south, early spring flowers, and other pictures descriptive of

the awakening life which surged all around, but when the pupils came to school the Monday before Easter they found all these had disappeared. A border of snowy lilies, pure and white and spotless, with their golden stamens and green leaves, stretched across the top of the black-boards, while here and there below were tiny butterflies of white or yellow. The whole effect was indescribably beautiful. There was not a boy or girl, however rough, but felt the inspiration of the Easter message and responded to it unconsciously, while to Ellen it came like a whisper of hope and comfort.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A LETTER.



UCH!"

It was Martha's voice, hoarse with pain and fright. "Miss Mitchell, Joe hit me straight in the eye with a piece of rubber."

"I didn't."

"You did!"

"That will do, Joe," said Miss Mitchell, with quiet authority. "What is the trouble, Martha?"

"Why, I was just a-studying my jog—I mean my geography lesson—bending over this way, when I felt something snap right over my eye, and it was Joe Martin, fooling with an elastic. Oo-ooh! I guess my eye's put out."

"I didn't do it," reiterated Joe.

"Let me see your eye." Miss Mitchell looked very grave. She bathed the swollen lid amid loud lamentation from Martha, who was badly frightened. As the pain subsided the girl's anger rose.

"He used to be always fooling that way last year. I guess it didn't really hurt as much as I thought first, but it might have."

"It was an exceedingly careless, thoughtless act," Miss Mitchell said, sternly. "Joe, did you say you did not do it?"

"No'm. I was writing in my copy-book."

"Oh! what a story. You know you did."

"Be quiet, Martha," Miss Mitchell spoke in a puzzled way. "I have never known Joe to tell an untruth. What makes you so positive? Did you see him?"

"I know it was him."

Jean looked around in perplexity.

"Do any of you know anything about it? You, Mary?"

"No ma'am."

"Or you, Harry?"

"I saw the elastic in Joe's pocket," the latter answered with some hesitation.

"He didn't," exclaimed Joe angrily.

"It's in there. I see it," said Martha in triumph.

"Put the things on your desk," Miss Mitchell directed.

The boy waited a moment. "I don't want to," he said, slowly.

"Joe, you must obey me."

Thus urged the lad drew out an orange, some cord and other trifles, and then a long strip of elastic, flushing scarlet as he held up the last article.

"It isn't mine. Truly, it isn't. I don't know where it came from. I'd tell you if I had done it."

Jean's face was troubled.

"Why did you hesitate to show what was in your pocket?"

"Why, because I meant the orange for a surprise for Johnny after school. I didn't want him to see it till then," and Joe smiled at the little fellow whose eyes danced with joyful anticipation. "I don't know anything about the rubber. I'm not afraid. I never told you a lie yet. I'd own up if I done it. Don't you believe me, Miss Mitchell?"

Jean looked straight into his eyes, but they met her gaze proudly and squarely. It was impossible to doubt the truth that shone from them.

"I *do* believe you, Joe," she said simply. "Martha must have been mistaken. Did any one hit her unintentionally?"

Martha had recovered her good-nature by that time.

"'Tisn't worth bothering about. Maybe Joe didn't do it after all. At any rate it doesn't hurt any now."

Jean made more inquiries but could discover nothing new. No one would acknowledge having seen the mischief done, but as time went on she was conscious of a vague indefinite doubt which kept intruding itself into her mind, an unwelcome guest.

She had been so proud of Joe's honesty, and had so admired his frank fearlessness. Yet the explanation was so easy. Perhaps he had been playing with the elastic and it had snapped before he thought, and then he had been surprised into denying all knowledge of it. Why had he hesitated to show the contents of his pockets that morning, if he had really been as innocent as he seemed? What had struck Martha if it had not been that? And yet—how could he have spoken so frankly and sincerely if he had done it? Not for worlds would she have let the boy suspect her bewilderment. He took things as they appeared on the surface. For him the incident had closed with his denial and her acceptance of it. The presence of the elastic had puzzled but did not trouble him in the least.

Days passed and Miss Mitchell began to think she would never unravel the mystery, but Evelyn came to her one afternoon and explained it in a few words.

"I'm going to tell you something," she said. "Perhaps it isn't the right thing to do, but I've made up my mind. It was Harry Stevens who hit Martha with the rubber that day. I saw him do it. He slipped it in Joe's pocket in a twinkling."

"Evelyn! Why didn't you tell me before?"

The girl saw the relief in her face and resented it in a vague way.

"I—I felt kind of sorry for Harry," she said, with some hesitation. "Joe's got everything. Everybody likes him, and he has good times. Harry's different. Nobody cares for him and I think he knows it. I wouldn't have told you now, only I see you look at Joe sometimes as if you wonder whether he really did it after all, or not. I thought you'd feel better to know."

Miss Mitchell flushed, realizing how closely those sharp young eyes were watching her.

"Evelyn," she said with a little anxiety. "I ought not to be glad, perhaps, but some way I can't help it. Do you think Joe ever suspected that I half doubted him?"

"Oh! no indeed," the girl spoke scornfully. "He just sees what's under his nose, Joe does. You can't hurt him unless you *hit* him."

Jean sat silent and thoughtful for a moment.

"I think you have acted very wisely in the matter. May I ask you not to speak to anyone else about it?"

"'Tisn't likely I will, as I haven't yet." Evelyn waited an instant, then added, "You—you won't be hard on him, will you?"

"Can't you trust Harry to me?" Miss Mitchell asked, so gently that the girl felt suddenly ashamed of her doubts.

"Oh, yes'm," she faltered. "I didn't mean to be rude. I can't say just what I mean, but—but I just thought— Miss Mitchell, Harry and I are so much alike,"—

"Oh! no, dear." The negation was so emphatic that Evelyn smiled.

"I don't mean that I slip out of things as he does, or that I have the same faults. I just mean that he is forlorn and so am I. There isn't much brightness in life for either of us."

Miss Mitchell's face was very pitiful.

"Evelyn, dear," she said, "I've never spoken to you about your mother, not because I am not sorry,

but because I feared that even the kindest words might wound you. I don't wonder life looks dreary. I wish I could say something to comfort you."

The strong lips quivered.

"She was so good and kind to me," she whispered. "I wish you had known her. You would have liked each other, I'm sure. She wasn't like me, so rough and abrupt. She had pretty manners, like yours, and little dainty ways that made everyone love her. Oh! Miss Mitchell, it is *hard*."

Jean saw the slow tears coursing down the girl's grave face. She put both arms around her and drew the proud head down to her shoulder.

"It is hard, dear," she said with so much tenderness that Evelyn felt for the first time the sweetness of human sympathy, and clung to her sobbing as if her heart would break.

"I never told anybody about it before. There wasn't any use. But I don't mind your pitying me."

Jean comforted her as best she could. The two hearts came very close to each other, and Evelyn went home at last feeling that the burden was less heavy than it had been, but Miss Mitchell sat for a long time in the lonely school-room struggling with the perplexities which beset her. How could she best help

Harry? In what way could she show him the gravity of his fault, yet help him to understand that he held the shaping of his life in his own hands?

The opportunity came sooner than she had expected. The older pupils had been reading "The Vision of Sir Launfal," and Joe remarked at noon the next day in his ingenuous way:

"Queer chap, that knight; wasn't he, Miss Mitchell?"

"Why?"

"Oh! I don't know. He kind of reminded me of myself where he went spluttering out in the first part, all on fire, and wanting to do big things right away. Poor old fellow! He had to wait a good while before he did anything worth doing. Wonder if I'll have to wait as long."

"I think you are doing things every day that are 'worth doing,' as you express it. No knight could do more than try his best to be brave and true and kind, and you are succeeding in all three, Joe." There was so much honest respect and admiration in her voice that the boy colored with pleasure.

"Thank you. And how about Ben?" he queried gayly.

Ben had stopped for a moment on his way past the

school. Miss Mitchell looked up at him with a smile. Big and brawny, with his sinewy arms and good-natured eyes, he looked like a Viking from the days of old.

"Ben is fighting his battles, too," she said pleasantly. "He will give some sledgehammer blows as he goes through life, but they will be at evil things, not at the good."

"And me, Miss Mitchell? What do you think about me?" asked a timid voice.

Jean turned quickly. Harry was glancing at her with his craftiest expression. The other boys had turned away, absorbed in some new subject.

"I hoped you'd ask me that some day, Harry," she said slowly. "Look in your geography to-night, and you will find the answer."

When school was out she handed him the book, saying:

"There is a note in it, Harry. Please don't read it till you are alone."

"All right," the boy answered. She stood at the door and watched him out of sight, half hoping, half fearing what the result of her action might be.

Harry walked on in the brightness of the April afternoon. Some of the children called to him, asking

him to wait, for they had tried to be friendly since Miss Mitchell had asked them, but he took no notice.

At the gate of his own home he paused and grew white with sudden fear. His father stood there evidently waiting for him.

"Look here!" he said harshly.

The boy obeyed, shivering. The man's gaze traveled over him, scornfully noting every motion, every indication of the terror he was endeavoring to conceal.

"Pooh! you coward! Why do you look like that? Am I a wild beast that my own son should tremble before me? I've heard a strange story about you, and, mind you, I mean to know the truth. Mr. Martin was telling me that you were singing at school. Is it true?"

The boy shuddered. "No, sir," he said faintly.

"I don't believe you. To-morrow I shall find out from Miss Mitchell, and if you have disobeyed me after all I've said I'll teach you a lesson you'll remember. Fah! Go to the barn. There isn't room for us both in the house. God only knows why He gave me such a coward for a son!"

The boy turned away, trembling in every limb. It was cool and dim and sweet-scented in the barn, and once out of his father's presence his unreasoning

terror passed. Taking up the lesson book he turned its pages mechanically. Yes, there was the little note in the dainty hand-writing he knew so well. Opening it he let the words print themselves upon his memory.

"Dear Harry," Miss Mitchell had written. "You have asked me to tell you what I think of you, and I shall do so frankly. I think you like me a little and because of that liking what I must say will hurt you. I hope so. Could I think of stronger words, words powerful enough to burn their way to your conscience I would not hesitate to use them; yet there is only pity in my heart.

"You are the only boy in school for whom I have not the slightest respect. Your word is valueless. Time after time you have deceived me and put the blame for your own deeds on some one else, as you did when you told me about the elastic in Joe's pocket. I am not *angry*. You have not injured me in any way. It is yourself you are hurting, yourself alone.

"Dear boy, don't you think it is time to stop? Can you afford to forfeit all confidence and respect? You have a will which God has given you and this you can control. If you will let me be your friend I will help you. Harry, will you not try now to start afresh?

JEAN MITCHELL."



CHAPTER XIX.

HARRY.



HARRY read the little note through to the end. She had indeed been frank. Every word cut him with the resistless force of a sword thrust. He had not deceived her at all. She had studied him with her keen scrutiny and formed her conclusions unsparingly, yet with a justice which went straight home to his seared conscience.

White with rage he tore the sheet of paper into tiny fragments. He would show her how little he cared for her judgment. There were many ways in which he could retaliate. She should learn the next day how valueless was her respect to him. Ah! but stop! Did he not value it? Had he not cared for her liking? He groaned aloud. All night he lay there in the dim quiet barn, tossing restlessly to and fro, too

wretched to sleep, and too much afraid of his father to go to the house. Jim, the old dog, came whining up and laid his shaggy head on the boy's arm. At any other time he would have pushed him away roughly, but that night even the poor brute's company seemed better than none, so he spoke kindly to him.

Morning came at last. He dared not stay after the light broke, lest his father should question him again. After wandering around for some time he resolved to go early to school. Miss Mitchell should have one day of misery, and then—then he would go away forever, away from Morrisville where everyone knew and disliked him.

Opening the school-house door he shuffled noisily in. Early as it was Miss Mitchell was there before him, putting the day's work on the board.

"Good morning, Harry," she said, as calmly as usual.

The boy made no answer. Something held him. Something constrained him to go quietly to his seat. He sat down and looked out of the window with dim eyes that saw none of the beauty outside.

Suddenly he started. Miss Mitchell was standing beside him. She must have spoken and he had not heard.

"Did you read the letter, Harry?" she asked gently.

There was no reply. In a vague way he felt the charm of her presence, but resented it as a kind of injustice. She leaned over and laid her hand on his grimy wrist, red and roughened from much outdoor work. The next moment he was conscious of a dull surprise. A big shining tear glistened on the slender white hand that clasped his. Miss Mitchell was crying! Lifting his eyes he looked steadily into her troubled face.

"It was a hard letter," he said grimly.

"Yes, it was. It hurt me, too, Harry. I would not have dared to write it if—if—" Miss Mitchell hesitated.

"If what?" he demanded with some curiosity.

"If some one had not told me I should."

The boy's eyes flashed.

"I knew it," he said angrily. "Who told you?"

"God." The sweet voice was very reverent. Harry looked away hastily. All at once it seemed to him that he could bear it no longer. All the pain and shame he had felt surged over him in mighty waves. Great noiseless sobs shook his whole body. Miss Mitchell let him cry. She knew that the bitter drops were healing to the sick soul.

"It was all true," he said at last.

"Yes."

There was a long silence. The school-room clock ticked slowly and solemnly. Jean broke the hush.

"Harry," she said, and her tones were very earnest and very gentle. "It *needn't* be true any longer. Will you let me try to help you? I am your friend."

"There isn't any use," hopelessly. "The boys all think I'm a sneak."

"Suppose we try to find a little light. Tell me how it all happened. It may have been my fault."

"No, it wasn't you." The boy faltered. Then the pity in her face gave him fresh courage and unlocked the gates of his slow speech. "It began long, long ago. I don't know whose fault it was at first. You see, Miss Mitchell, my father is one of these awfully proud, hard kind of men. What he says he means, an' there ain't no turnin' him. He ain't afraid of anything himself an' he can't understand why anyone else should be. My mother died when I was born, an' that made him dreadfully bitter, so folks say. If she had lived it might have been different. I've always been afraid of little things. My father sees it, an' it makes him angry. He wants me to be brave an' strong like himself, an' because I can't, he is harsh

with me. Nothing I do is ever quite right. An' then my singing. He thinks it makes me babyish. He has forbidden me to do it. One night I was humming. I didn't know he was anywhere around, but he heard me. See here, Miss Mitchell." There were cruel scars on his arms and shoulders. Jean shuddered and turned sick at the sight, but the boy went on steadily, "Oh! he didn't mean to hurt like that. He doesn't understand that he is cruel. I suppose—no, I *know* that he believes he is doing his best for me. But I am afraid of him."

The boy's lips were white. It was evident that he was in the deepest earnest. Jean listened in silence. The whole trouble was so different from anything she had fancied. She had never come in contact with like circumstances before.

"So I took to lying," Harry went on calmly. "I've sneaked out of lots of things that way. Father never troubled himself to find out the truth. If the teachers told him little things I'd done, he would punish me without finding out whether it was my fault or not. As soon as I got big enough to reason about things, I saw that I could slip out of trouble lots of times by being sly. I liked you when you came. You were different from most of the others. But I couldn't

stop myself. First thing I knew I'd be doin' little sneakin' things, an' then when you asked if it was me I'd say 'No,' same as ever. The day I hit Martha I didn't really mean to. I had the elastic, fooling with it, snapping it softly and pulling it through my fingers, when it flew out an' struck her over the eye. Joe sat in front of me. Nobody had seen me. Martha thought it was him. I slipped the rubber in his pocket as quick as I could, for I thought you would be angry if you knew I did it. It was more like him anyway than like me. I never thought you would care as much as you did. An' then when you asked me about it I was sure you'd never like me if I owned up, so I told you it was in Joe's pocket. An' now you know all about it."

"My poor, poor boy!" Miss Mitchell could say nothing more for a moment. She felt strangely self-condemned. How could she ever have given so wrong an impression? Something whispered comfortingly that she never had. It was only an idea born of the lad's warped nature. But he was waiting eagerly. He seemed younger and more boyish in the relief from the tension which had held him so long. Jean longed to help him.

"Harry, you have been very, very wrong," she

said firmly but kindly. "And yet I am afraid it was partly my fault. If I had been gentler with you you might have found it easier to be true. But it is all over now. Nothing can change the past or make it better, but the future we may make different. *I'm* sorry, Harry. I think you are sorry, too."

"Yes, I am. Precious lot of good that does."

"That's nonsense." Miss Mitchell spoke in her most cheerful tones. "The regret we feel will keep us from doing the same thing again. Harry, do you really care what I think?"

"Yes."

"And you really want to make things right? Well, I wonder if you could do a hard, hard thing? I'm sorry, yet I don't see any other way. Could you—would you be brave enough to tell the boys and girls about it and set Joe right?"

Harry hesitated. "I—I couldn't," he faltered slowly.

"Not if you knew it was the bravest thing to do? If you knew I wanted you to?"

"Would—would you like me a little if I did?"

"*Like* you?" Miss Mitchell's eyes were shining. "Harry, I would honor you with all my heart."

"Then I'll do it." There was the ring of unwonted decision in his voice. "An' you—you'll help me, as you said?"

"Always. I'll never be too busy if you need me. You're not going to be afraid any more. You are going to be brave and strong and true."

"Like Joe?" wistfully.

"Like your own real self. Oh! Harry, I shall be so proud of you."

The room was very quiet. Outside the bees hummed lazily. A great yellow butterfly fluttered on dazzling wings over the green grass. The boy thought he had never known before how fair the world was. He felt a great joy, a realization that life held something worth winning. Moved by a sudden impulse Jean sat down beside him.

"Harry," she said. "It is very hard for me to speak about the things I feel most. But when I have done wrong I like to tell my Captain about it and ask for help. You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes." She could hardly hear the whispered word.

Never as long as the boy lived would he forget the quiet of the spring morning, the hush in the old school-room, and the tender voice with its simple petition:

"Dear Lord Jesus, Thou who art Harry's Captain and mine, we have both been wrong. We are sorry now. Forgive us, and help us to be Thy true soldiers forever. Amen."



CHAPTER XX.

ARBOR DAY.

SUCH preparation as there was for Arbor Day! The school-yard had been raked free from all fallen leaves and withered branches. By the side of the school-house the boys had dug two long beds and filled them with rich, moist earth from the woods. Morning-glory, pansy, pink, portulacca and other seeds had been planted in them. Mrs. Martin had sent a number of hardy plants, such as columbines, peonies and other old favorites, while Mr. Bergen came with several vines, which he directed the boys to plant around the windows.

“We’ll hold the exercises out doors if the weather

is clear," Miss Mitchell said. "Of course we'll plant a tree. I think it will be best to decide by vote which kind it shall be. It will require considerable thought, for we want to select one that will do well in this soil and be worth most in the future."

The question proved an absorbing one. The older pupils consulted many authorities and read many articles on the subject.

"I never knew trees were so interesting. They're worth more than anyone suspects. Why can't each of us write a piece about the kind we like best, and then read it to the school before we make the choice?" Frank suggested. "I think the oak is my favorite."

"It isn't mine," exclaimed Joe. "Let's try Frank's plan, Miss Mitchell, please? The *apple* is the best tree there is. I can get some good arguments for it, too."

Jean consented, pleased to see the enthusiasm manifested.

Meeting Mr. Martin a day or two afterward she was amused to see him lift a warning finger as he exclaimed humorously.

"Teacher, don't ye work our Joe too hard. He's a-gittin' wore to a shadder worryin' about that there comp'sition o' his. I've told him all I ever knowed

or heerd about apple trees an' yit he ain't satisfied. His ma an' him they jest keep up a sort o' runnin' fire on the subject. I git it mornin's with my oatmeal, noons with my soup, an' nights I dream about it."

"I'm sorry for you," Jean said laughingly.

"Well, ye may well be." Then with sudden seriousness. "I tell ye, Miss Mitchell, his ma an' me don't forgit all you've done for that boy. We ain't said much, 'cause we know ye don't want any thanks, but we ain't blind. Joe's the only one we've got, an' we can't help takin' a mighty sight o' int'rest in him. An' says I to him, says I, 'If ye write the best piece an' the boys an' girls choose *your* tree, I'll give ye one o' my very best apple trees.' So he's doin' his level best an' puttin' in every spare minute a-writin'."

The afternoon when the decision was made was one of quiet excitement. The pupils soon saw that the two who had taken the greatest pains with their arguments were Joe and Frank. No hard feelings existed between them, each being perfectly good-natured over the matter. Miss Mitchell left them until the last. In her own mind she felt confident that Frank would win, for he had a more logical mind and was naturally a better writer. He presented a well-written paper, full of cogent reasons for his choice. The selection

of the oak seemed inevitable as he finished, but to everyone's surprise Joe's long meditation had produced remarkable results. His paper was ingenious and thoughtful in the extreme, abounding in sound arguments and brightened by touches of humor.

Frank listened attentively. As Joe concluded, he rose with a twinkle in his eye.

"Miss Mitchell, I would like to withdraw my arguments," he said. "My opponent has convinced me of the superiority of his choice and I would like to suggest that it be made unanimous."

Amused by his business-like air Jean called for a rising vote and Joe saw with pride that he had won the day.

But Joe's pride was as nothing compared with the elation of his father.

"I always knowed that boy had something in him," he declared to Sandy. "Ye ought to hear that composition. It's remarkable. Teacher says she wants him to read it at the exercises on Arbor Day. I'm goin'. Ma she thinks she won't be there, fear o' flusterin' him, but I guess likely she'll go, after all. Don't believe she'd miss it for a good bit."

"Nae doot it wad be a waesome peety if she did," Sandy answered with sarcasm which was entirely lost on his listener.

There were many spring flowers in bloom by that time. It took sharp eyes to keep up with the changing procession. The children pressed specimens of every leaf and flower they could find, mounting them carefully on a large chart. Already arbutus, blood-root, anemones and hepaticas had vanished, making room for the hardier blooms of columbines, violets, spring beauties and wild pinks.

Invitations for the Arbor Day exercises were of cardboard cut in the shape of different leaves, bearing the words:

"Come and see us plant a tree."

The boys arranged benches outside of the school-house for the grand occasion. Mr. Martin had kept his word and had sent a fine young apple tree which gave promise of abundant growth. Everyone wanted to help dig the hole for it, and that was done before school on the morning of Arbor Day.

The day proved warm and pleasant, an ideal one for the purpose. Miss Mitchell had the organ carried out under the trees which were already beautiful with their delicate leafage.

When the benches had been filled by an expectant audience she gave the signal chord. Out from the old school-house came the boys and girls, marching

two by two. The girls had twined leaves and flowers into wreaths and garlands, the boys wore clusters of pink oak leaves on their coats, and the smiling faces and erect figures made a pretty picture under the blue sky.

As the procession wound in and out around the open space the children sang:

THE TREE SONG.



Waking, waking, up in the trees, little leaves are waking.

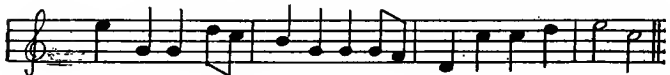


Green and fair above our heads leafy flags are shaking.

CHORUS.



Wave your banners little leaves, oh! wave your banners brightly.



April days have come again, and spring is calling lightly.

Golden sunshine falls upon you,
Then the rain drops glitter;
Open wide your fluted folds
While the robins twitter.

Waking, waking, up in the trees,
Little leaves uncurling,
Wave and dance the whole day long,
Tiny flags unfurling.

Then the smallest children played they were trees in which little birds built their nests, and waved their branches to and fro with the unconscious grace of childhood.

Evelyn recited Bryant's poem, "Planting the Apple Tree." Will read a short paper on "What Trees Do," showing their effect on climate, moisture, etc., presented so simply yet entertainingly that no one grew tired of listening. Harold told the story of Appleseed Johany in his childish way. Susie read an essay on "The Trees of History."

Then Miss Mitchell told how the pupils had chosen the apple tree, and introduced Joe, who looked very proud and handsome as he read the paper he had prepared with so much care.

The ceremony of planting came next. It was a charming sight to see the earnest faces watch while the four oldest boys placed the tree in its broad, deep home, with due regard that none of the tiny rootlets should be crushed or crowded. Then while all sang the Planting Song each child in turn came forward and put in a spadeful of earth.

PLANTING SONG.



While the birds are chirping, chirping sweet and clear,



Little songs of gladness ringing far and near,



Now the children gather singing light and gay,



"This is happy, happy Arbor Day!"

Bring the little apple,
 Sturdy, straight and fair;
By the sunny roadside
 Plant it now with care.
All its tiny branches
 In the wind will play,
While its roots grow stronger day by day.
Grow then, little apple,
 Ever stronger grow,
Through the storm or sunshine,
 Through the frost and snow,
For the merry children
 Singing light and gay
Plant you with their love this Arbor Day!

Another march closed the exercises, and as pupils and audience alike gathered around to admire the grace and beauty of the tiny tree, Jean smiled to hear Freddie prophesy:

"Yes, and years and years from now, when *we've* all grown to be men and women, other children will like to see the blossoms on these branches in spring, and they'll watch the tiny green apples grow and swell, and eat the ripe fruit in autumn, and be glad that we boys and girls planted it here on Arbor Day."



CHAPTER XXI.

“ALL IN THE MONTH OF MAY.”

A WORLD of blossoms! In every orchard the grass was white with fallen petals while the boughs were still laden with fragrant bloom. The woods were a mist of wild azalea. In the school-room great jars filled with the graceful pink flowers stood on the window-sills and in the corners.

On the organ a tall, slender glass vase had been placed, and in it a solitary Jack-in-the-pulpit, quaint little preacher, stood up under his green and purple canopy.

The deep blue of violets and the gold of buttercups added brightness here and there, while fronds of sweet fern made a charming background for the flowers themselves.

The children folded May baskets of pink and blue, filled them with blossoms, and hung them on the doorbells of the village houses. Flossie gave hers to 'Squire Bronton, an unwonted attention which so soothed his choleric nature that he spent a morning in the school-room. Teacher and pupils treated him with distinguished consideration. So much impressed was he by the quiet order and attention which prevailed that he asked Miss Mitchell if he might speak a word to the school.

"You all know me," he began with a chuckle. "An' I know *you*, 'specially the boys. There ain't one o' you, hardly, but what I've chased out o' my wheat fields some time or other. You've plegged me an' I've plegged back ag'in. I thought you was all pretty despr'it characters. But since I've set here an' seen how quiet you *kin* be, an' how much int'rest you seem to take in your lessons, why! it 'pears as if I might have been mistaken. Mebbe you're more bark than bite, hey? I used to think there wasn't but one way o' managin' a school, an' that was to hev a good big stick

standin' in the corner." (The boys grinned appreciatively.) "An' then for the teacher not to be afraid to use it. That's the way they did in my time. We learnt our A B C's with a whack in between ev'ry three letters, an' when we got bigger, why! we got more thrashin'.

"But I ruther surmise I've been wrong about some things. I've watched you pretty close since I come in, an' I guess that if the teacher kin keep order gentle like it's all the better. So, Miss Mitchell, I take back all I've said ag'inst you. An' I guess the boys an' me will git along better after this. Hey, boys?"

"Yes, sir," with great heartiness.

Jean shook hands with him cordially, rejoicing that the old feud was at an end.

They had a great many visitors. Somehow an unusual interest in the school had sprung up in the neighborhood. Sometimes a hard-working mother would slip in for an hour or two, finding herself rested and entertained by the change of surroundings. Sometimes a farmer on his way to town stopped for a few moments to listen to his boys and girls as they recited their lessons. Everyone was welcome. Everyone felt that Miss Mitchell enjoyed their presence and valued their friendship.

"It's a koind way she's got with her," Mrs. Maloney said admiringly. "Niver does she miss inquirin' afther me rheumatiz. Glory be! ye'd think Oi was the quane hersilf! An' the childhers!—'tis wonderful the way they moind her. There's me Jimmy. Niver a bit does he care for his father threat'nin' him with the strap whin he's home. But sez Miss Mitchell, sez she, 'Faces front, if ye plaze,' sez she, as plisant as a May mornin,' an' 'round comes me Jimmy's face as quick as a wink, an' straight to his wurruk he goes. The saints be praised! She's got thim roight where she wants thim."

She was addressing Mrs. Peters over the back fence on a Monday morning. The latter lifted her hands from the suds, and suspended washing in the interest of the theme.

"I was down at the school myself on Thursday afternoon," she said. "Ain't it fixed up pretty? I was settin' there a-list'nin' to a 'rithmetic lesson, an' all at once a cute little green grasshopper jumped right in 'at the window, an' hopped straight across the platform as peart as could be. All the children smiled, but there wasn't any loud laughin' or shoutin', an' up went Johnny Stubbs' hand as polite as you please.

"'T'd like to know something about that little fellow,' says he.

"Miss Mitchell turned to Tom an' says she, 'Do you s'pose you could catch it without hurtin' it?'

"Tom said yes, so he put it on her desk under a glass. Right after the 'rithmetic lesson she said, 'I'll tell you about it now, for the little thing doesn't like to be a pris'ner.'

"Well! I thought there wasn't much to hear about one o' them hoppers. But. my sakes! She set a magnifyin' glass on top of it an' let 'em all look at it. Then she begun an' told all about its life, what the little feelers on its legs are for, what it eats an' how it sleeps, all in a story. I tell you, it was as good as a 'fairy tale. I was as bad as the children. They all said, 'Oh! don't stop,' when she finished. I felt like sayin' it, too, for I never knowed a grasshopper was so int'restin'. She told 'em a little about folks goin' through life with their eyes an' ears open an' yet not noticin' the curious things all around 'em. An' do you know, as I come up the road with Molly an' Kate afterwards, seemed as if I seen more o' the 'little people o' the fields an' medders,'—that's what she called 'em, than I'd ever seen before."

As May passed and Memorial Day drew near, Jean wondered how she might best conduct the exercises. She wished to impress her boys and girls with the

original meaning of the day, that it might be a time of gentle memories and reverent thoughts, a time when love for country should burn brightly in each young heart, when the nation's dead should be honored, yet each child should be made to understand that there are heroes in peace as well as in war.

Harry had promised to sing. The whole school recognized the difference in the boy. He no longer shuffled or looked at persons with side-long glances. It was a pleasure to look into his pleasant gray eyes which met one's gaze proudly. It was not always easy for him to be frank. Not even Miss Mitchell knew how many times he had been tempted to give up the struggle, nor did she realize his passionate gratitude to her. She knew he liked her, for she saw the boyish face brighten at her approach. She had given him back his self-respect. The boy could not forget it. Everything had been different with him since then.

He had gone to his father when school was out on that April day and had told him a strange story to which the stern old man listened in mingled anger and amazement. Surely the boy who faced him so unflinchingly was not his Harry! When the lad had finished, Mr. Stevens went straight to Miss Mitchell. He had come back strangely quiet. Harry wondered a

little what she had told him, but he never knew. His father made no reference to what he had heard, but the next day had surprised his son by saying slowly :

“Harry, I’m told you have a good voice of your own. Your mother had, too. I don’t know that I care if you sing a bit.”

Harry had obeyed fearlessly. He was no longer afraid of his father. The supreme effort he had made in telling his story had broken the last band of terror. Sometimes the sweet voice ringing through the gloaming would pierce the listener’s heart with the keenest memories, but the old man never remonstrated. Slowly but surely the two hearts were gaining a gentler understanding of each other.

One by one the beautiful May days came and went



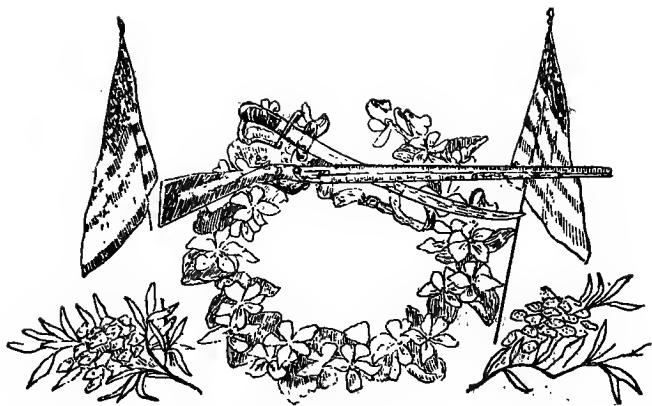
while the skies grew bluer and the birds sang more sweetly. Two Baltimore orioles came and looked at the branches of the big elm by the west window of the school.

"They're hunting for a good place to build their nest," Molly said. "I'm afraid they'll think there are too many children around here."

The orioles, however, did not seem to be at all disturbed by the merry eyes that watched them. They decided that the old elm was just the place for a safe home, so they sang and worked and worked and sang, as busy and happy as the workers in the school-room.

The children liked to think they were helping the birds, so Jean let them hang pretty threads and bits of twine on the bushes, and many of these the cunning weavers fastened in the dainty pocket which soon swung from the tree.

"It's our nest as well as theirs," Freddie would remark with a sigh of satisfaction after he had examined it through the teacher's spy-glass, and when at last Joe discovered that there were tiny birds in it, it would have been hard to tell which were the proudest, the demure little mother, the gay father, or the delighted children.



CHAPTER XXII.

MEMORIAL DAY.

IT WAS Jack who unconsciously gave Miss Mitchell her next suggestion for Memorial Day.

“My father wants to come to the exercises,” he said with pride. My uncle was a color-bearer in the war of '61. He was shot in the battle of Fredericksburg and they wrapped him in the Stars and Stripes and buried him on the battlefield. Father's always been so proud of him. When I was little he used to tell me about it. He never went to the war himself, for he wasn't old enough, but he says he will

never forget seeing his brother march away. Uncle Frank was only a boy, too, not quite nineteen when he died. Father has the last letter he sent to grandmother. It was written the night before the battle. There were other letters, but they were all destroyed by fire, and this is the only one that's left. It's very interesting."

"I should think it would be. Of course we shall be glad to have your father come." Then with a sudden inspiration, "Jack, I wonder if he would let me read that letter to the school?"

"Why! I think so. I'll ask him."

Mr. White willingly consented. Jack brought the letter the next day, and Jean found it all she had hoped, so she planned the program in keeping with its thought. There were only two old soldiers in the neighborhood. They were invited to be present, and Miss Mitchell asked if they would tell of their war-time experiences, but both refused to speak on so momentous an occasion.

The afternoon before the exercises the school-room was transformed into a bower of beauty. Great banks of snowy daisies were massed against the platform and along the sides of the room, large flags were artistically draped from the walls and ceiling, completely concealing the blackboards, the entire decorations consisting

only of flags and flowers, a combination of impressive beauty.

The audience arrived early. Jack looked anxiously for his father, fearing that he might not come after all, but Jean smiled assurance at him, and was as glad as the boy when he came in at last. He had evidently made unusual preparations for the event, and Miss Mitchell was surprised at the dignity of his bearing.

The two Grand Army men and the minister occupied the seats of honor on the platform, the former uneasily conscious of the bright eyes of the pupils, yet extremely proud of their unusual importance.

Jean was very fond of the white-haired old minister who had been a friend to her ever since she had first come to Morrisville. She had asked him to open the exercises with prayer. Almost all the children regarded him as a father, and from the moment that he took them with him into the presence of the King of Kings, she knew that her desire for the day would be fulfilled.

After two or three songs by the school, Miss Mitchell rose, holding the letter with its faded writing.

"We have purposely made the program this afternoon very simple," she said. "The thought of Memorial Day is that of remembrance. We are all familiar

with the historical events of the war of '61. The boys and girls in the history classes have learned to recognize that there were brave men on both sides in that struggle. It is not very often, however, that we have a chance to come into contact with a personal experience or to know the thoughts of those who were actors in those scenes.

I count it an honor to be permitted to read to you to-day a letter written by a boy soldier to his mother on the night before the first battle of Fredericksburg. It is a letter which shows most plainly the spirit of the writer.

'FREDERICKSBURG, Dec. 12, 1862.

My Own Dear Mother:

I have been thinking of you all day and wondering what you are doing. If I could look in to-night and just get one peep at you and father and the boys how happy it would make me. Don't worry about me, though. I am as well as can be. Nelson is just cooking our coffee over the camp-fire. Our regiment crossed the river this afternoon. The boys all think we are getting ready for a big battle. Every now and then a shell bursts somewhere near us, but we are getting so accustomed to them that no one takes much notice.

It seems strange to sit here and listen to the hum

and buzz of the great army and watch the camp-fires brighten up the sky. John Golden was on picket duty last night. He is lying here beside me wrapped in his blanket fast asleep. I told him I was going to write to you. He said, 'Remember me to the folks at home, and tell them I am too tired to write to-night, but send my best love.'

Nelson says he is sure we will be in battle to-morrow, and he is afraid it will go hard with us, for the other fellows have the best position in every way.

Mother, dear, if anything should happen to me to-morrow, and I should never return, I want you to remember that I think about all you said to me that last night at home. I am trying to be brave in the little things. I am not afraid, for I know I am safe in God's keeping, and I will carry the flag wherever it is my duty to go.

To-morrow I expect a letter from you and will write more then, but now good night. Take good care of yourself and don't worry about me.

Your own soldier boy,

FRANK.' "

There were dim eyes in the old school-room as the reading ended. The simple words had gone home to each father and mother heart there, while the listening pupils felt a thrill of admiration and respect for the boy who had written them.

"He never wrote any more," Miss Mitchell said

softly. "The next day during the terrific battle, while carrying the flag with signal bravery, he was shot and instantly killed.

"We honor him with all our hearts as we do all the other brave men who fought so nobly for what they deemed right; and we do well to so regard them. They have earned our reverence and our love. Yet they are not the only heroes, nor is theirs the only courage.

"It is comparatively easy to be a brave soldier when the bugles are playing, the drums beating, when the starry flag flutters overhead and the air quivers with the roar of cannon. He who *dies* for his country we count a hero. But is it not just as brave to *live* for her? He who in silence conquers himself in little faults, who makes up his mind that he will be the best and truest that he can, he is after all the bravest soldier. The man or woman, the boy or girl who tries to be faithful in every duty and loyal in the face of temptation, although no eye may note the struggle and no voice speak approval now, will not fail of honor in the great Hereafter.

"To-morrow, boys and girls, we shall go with reverent hearts to drop the flowers of remembrance on the graves of those who gave their country the best they had. Shall we do less than they? She needs, not sol-

diers now, but brave true hearts that shall make the world honor this land of ours. What shall we give her? How shall we serve her? Each one can best answer the question for himself. None are too old, none too young, to feel the thrill of loyalty and to say with Lowell,

‘Those love her best who to themselves are true,
And what they dare to dream of, dare to do.’ ”

The school sang “America” next, and then Jack repeated Lincoln’s solemn and magnificent Gettysburg address. The tall lad began a little diffidently, but soon forgot his embarrassment as the meaning of the noble words came to him with new clearness. Something of the spirit which had animated Lincoln on that day surged through his veins. Every particle of timidity vanished and gazing proudly into the faces of his audience he spoke the immortal sentences with the power and simplicity which belongs to them.

* * * * “The world will little note nor long remember what we *say* here, but it can never forget what they *did* here.

“It is for us, the living, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work they have thus far so nobly carried on. It is for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we

take increased devotion to the cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

There was a moment's hush as he finished, then the little school-room fairly trembled with applause, while more than one farmer leaned forward to whisper to his wife, "Was that old Billy White's boy? Who'd a-thought he had it in him?"

Jack's father himself sat as if in a dream. Memory was busy painting pictures for him. There had been a time long years before when he had stood before an audience by the side of which the crowd in the old school-house was as nothing, and had heard thousands thunder their applause to his eloquence. Once more he heard the noted judge who had spoken after him pay tribute to his talents, and add the kindly prophecy, "The world may some day ring with the name of William Norman White." Once more he saw the admiration and delight in the blue eyes of the girl who loved him.

Years had gone since then. The kindly judge had

passed into the "Land Beyond," the blue eyes of the bright-faced girl had closed in their last slumber, the men and women who had made up that great audience had long forgotten the voice which had roused and thrilled them, and only he, "old Bill White," far away from the scenes of his early manhood, remembered with bitter pain and regret the brilliant dreams and ambitions of that speaker.

Susie recited Longfellow's poem, Decoration Day, next, quietly and gently in unison with its thought, the last lines falling through a silence that was absolute.

Rest, comrades, rest and sleep.
The thoughts of men shall be
As sentinels, to keep
Your rest from danger free.

Your silent tents of green
We deck with fragrant flowers.
Yours has the suffering been,
The memory shall be ours.

After a flag song by the little ones, who looked as dainty as flowers, Jean gave a chord on the organ and Harry sang "The Star Spangled Banner." The stirring notes rang out as silver-sweet as a flute, full of the exquisite yet unconscious pathos which only a boy's

voice ever holds. Many a listener wiped away a tear, and Hiram Morley confided to Mrs. Martin in a shame-faced whisper :

"Never cried over that song before, but it put me in mind o' my mother. She used to sing it to us little fellers when it was gettin' dark, an' we was all boys at home."

Walter Moore stepped out in front of the room at the close of the song, carrying a large flag which he handed to the old soldiers. As the two men raised it on high the boys and girls rose and the audience, thoroughly in the spirit of the occasion, followed their example.

With uplifted hand, each gave the familiar flag salute. "We give our heads, our hands and our hearts to our country. One country! one language! one flag!"

Then the whole school sang,

OUR LAND AND FLAG.



One country seems the fairest far, one flag we love the best.



Our native land, our native flag, we prize above the rest



Let France her colors wide unfurl, let England's banner glow.



We're loyal to the Stars and Stripes, no fairer flag we know.

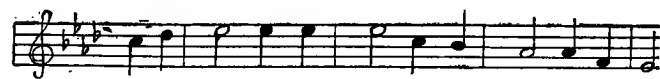
CHORUS.



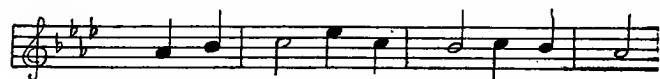
Then hurrah for the flag, for our own shining flag



With its glory of red, white and blue,



May it gleam, as of old, through the years that shall come,



Over hearts that are loyal and true!

And if the round we tread be small,

Or if afar we roam,

We'll proudly stand for God and right,

And for the flag of home.

Our country still shall claim the best

Our loving hearts can give;

For her, if duty calls, we'll die,

For her we'll bravely *live*.

The little song closed the exercises, but the audience lingered, talking in quiet tones with a deeper reverence for the Stars and Stripes and a new sense of the meaning of Memorial Day.

As Miss Mitchell returned the letter to Mr. White, she was surprised to see a new purpose in his face. She had often noticed his resemblance to Jack. This seemed intensified as he said with a smile:

"Don't thank me, Miss Mitchell. It was a pleasure to do anything for you. You have been a good friend to my boys. Perhaps you may be glad to know that I mean to try to be a better and a braver man hereafter, for their sakes."

And Jean, noting the firm lips and resolute expression, realized with sincere gladness that Jack would never again have cause to feel ashamed of his father.



CHAPTER XXIII.

A DECISION.

THE warm days of summer had come in earnest. Wild roses bloomed along the dusty roadsides where the goldenrod had shone in September. Laurel blushed pink in the depths of the woods. The purple flowers of the pitcher-plant rose straight and tall above the curious green pitchers. Fields were white with daisies, and meadows sweet with pink and white clover over which the honey bees went busily humming.

There were but two more weeks of school. Then

the long, idle days of vacation would bring the rest which Jean knew she needed.

"You will come back to us next year, won't you?" the trustees had begged singly and in unison. "We are willing to pay a hundred dollars more to keep you."

She had not replied decisively. In her desk lay a letter from the principal of one of the Newton schools offering her a position there. It was a tempting offer, but she had left the decision till she should hear from her mother.

Joe brought this second letter from the postoffice when school was over one afternoon. The boy fancied it might influence her and as he handed it to her, said wistfully.

"Your mother likes us pretty well, doesn't she?"

"Yes, indeed," Miss Mitchell answered with no suspicion of his meaning. "Why, Joe?"

"Nothing. That is, I hope she will say you ought to stay with us next year."

Jean laughed. "Aren't you tired of me yet?"

"No. You know we're not. Won't you please stay, Miss Mitchell?"

"I don't know what to do. It's pretty hard to decide, Joe."

"Well, I won't stay to bother you. But remem-

ber we all want you here," and Joe walked off gravely while Jean hastened to see what her mother had said.

She read the letter over and over, then laid it down with a sigh. It had not helped her much. The school-room was silent and deserted. Outside the tall trees swayed in the summer wind and the vines rustled around the windows. The decision was as hard as ever.

If she accepted the Newton position, she would be with her mother and sister. The work with but one grade would be much easier, and there would be the advantages afforded by a larger social circle. The salary offered, although not quite so large as Morrisville had promised, would really mean as much since she could board at home. She *must* go, she thought, with homesick eagerness. And yet, there were so many things that she had left undone during the year which needed doing. There were her boys and girls, too. Fancy brought them before her. She understood and loved them as no one else could without long acquaintance. They would need her next year, perhaps, more than ever, for they were giving her fuller confidence each day, and her influence swayed them more and more.

Hasty Joe, who yielded unhesitating obedience to

her wishes, stubborn Alec, manly Frank, tiny Dorothy with her crooked tongue and pretty ways, Ellen whose nervous manners would annoy anyone who did not love her, Harry—ah! did not Harry need her warm friendship and earnest sympathy? One by one the bright faces rose before her with mute eloquence.

Taking up her mother's letter she read the post-script again:

"Dearest Jean, you know we want you at home with us next year. The house has seemed so lonely without you, and Ruth and I have yearned each day for your sunshiny presence. And yet, dear heart, if you think you are needed there for another year, if you feel that your work is not yet done, and that you can make further use of the love you have won, do not be influenced by our desire to have you with us. We are both well, Ruthie and I, and I am stronger than I have been for several years.

No one can decide the matter for you. You know what is best to do. We are looking forward to the long, happy days of vacation. Only two more weeks and then how glad we shall all be. Good-bye, my darling, and God bless you. Much love from

MOTHER."

Jean sat for a long time, thinking and planning. When at last she rose to go the battle had been fought and the decision made.

The next morning as she glanced over's Joe examples she was amused to find a tiny note tucked in among them.

"Dear Miss Mitchell," he had written, "I can't wait till noon to ask you. Won't you please tell me what you are going to do? If you smile I shall know you mean to stay with us, and if you look grave that will mean you have to go. Please don't mind my asking."
JOE."

Jean looked over at his corner of the room. The boy was watching her so anxiously that she could not have helped smiling had she wished. As it was she gave him a smile of such cordial good-fellowship that Joe clapped his hands in joyous pantomime.

How fast the two weeks flew! The weather was very warm, but the boys and girls paid little heed to the heat.

"We ought to show Miss Mitchell how glad we are that she is coming back," Frank had suggested. The older pupils accepted the suggestion at once and the younger ones took pride in following their example. They tried to please her in every possible way, and Jean realizing at least a part of the affection thus shown could not regret the decision she had made.

The garden was gay with flowers during those last

weeks. One morning Miss Mitchell made a discovery which touched and pleased her.

All through the year Gretchen had maintained the same stolid unresponsive demeanor that had characterized her at first. The most thrilling story, the sweetest poem, the merriest song failed to awake any perceptible emotion.

"There must be *something* she takes an interest in," Jean thought in despair. "Surely no child can be so hopelessly insensible as she seems."

All in vain did she appeal to her sympathy or animation, however. Gretchen regarded her with placid and unvarying indifference. The first time she showed any pleasure was when she was allowed to set out some pansy-plants for Arbor Day.

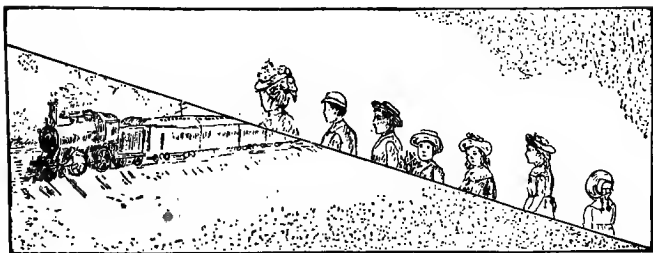
She had taken so long that Miss Mitchell had felt half impatient, but happening to glance at her she saw the dull features lit up by a smile of genuine enjoyment and checked her remonstrance.

But on the morning in question she was astonished to see Gretchen bending over the pansies with a face really irradiated by wonder.

"My plants have bloomed, Miss Mitchell," she exclaimed hastily. "My plants, that *I* planted, have *flowers* on them!"

Jean looked down at the purple and gold blossoms, nestling among their green leaves, and sympathized with her delight, thinking at the same time that the greater wonder was the sudden wakening of the child's soul.

May and June were royal months for nature study. Each noon the school-house was deserted, and teacher and pupils went into the shady depths of the woods, returning laden; sometimes with the cool, green leaves of the pitcher plant, sometimes with the sweet pulpy apples of the wild azalea, white magnolia blossoms heavy with fragrance, quaint mosses and lichens, ferns to be planted on the shady side of the building, and countless other treasures, each of which furnished its unconscious lesson.



CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LAST DAY.

THE LAST DAY!

At noon all the pretty decorations had been taken from the walls, that the room might be thoroughly cleaned during vacation. The pictures had been carefully put away, the boards washed, and everything made ready for its long summer rest. As Jean looked around the bare room it reminded her of the first morning she had seen it. The only differences were that smooth blackboards reached all around it in striking contrast to the cracked and broken ones which had been there then, that desks and organ had been varnished into respectability, curtains hung at the windows, and an indefinable air of neatness rested every-

where. In spite of herself a little tinge of sadness crept into her heart.

They had spent the morning in reviewing the work of the year. Miss Mitchell had asked them several days before what they preferred to do on the last afternoon.

"Shall we have visitors and a regular program, or would you rather have a quiet time all by ourselves?"

The vote for the latter plan had been unanimous. She had promised to tell them a story and they would spend some time in singing. It had seemed very easy when she planned it, but somehow there was an uncomfortable lump in her throat, and the story was cut short by a sob from Dorothy, who had caught a glimpse of the satchel under the desk and realized all at once how near the parting was.

"Oh! Mif Mitchell, we won't see you any more for 'most free monfs!" she cried.

"I'm coming back in September," Jean said, half laughing, half crying. "You funny children, you look as solemn as owls. Let's sing something that will brighten us all up a little."

So they sang song after song, Harry's sweet voice leading. Each one suggested its own memories of happy days.

"The Christmas song, when we had the tree, you know."

"Washington's birthday! Oh! do you remember about our hatchets that morning?"

So they talked and sang until the last few moments came. Then Jean rose with her heart full of thoughts. What had the year done for *her*? It seemed a long, long time since that first morning when Mr. Martin had introduced her to the pupils. She had been an eager light-hearted girl then, with little sense of responsibility. To help Joe she had learned to control her own naturally quick temper, love for Ellen had given her patience, while for Harry's sake she had become exceedingly careful of even the slightest statement. The old careless irresponsibility had gone forever, but life was richer, fuller and sweeter than it had ever been. If she had helped them, they had also helped her.

Looking down at their earnest faces she felt a warm glow of pleasure, a thrill of pride in the quiet order which had been evolved out of chaos.

"Boys and girls," she said, and the gentle voice had the same sweetness that had claimed their attention on that September morning, "I have been thinking about the first time I stood here. I was dreadfully afraid of

you then. There seemed to be so many of you and you all stared at me so, so to keep up my own courage I spoke about soldiers. I asked you to be loyal and brave and obedient. It is a year since then. We have grown to know each other pretty well. We have made mistakes and been sorry together. We have had pleasant times and sad times. And now the year is over and we shall not be together for more than two months. I wish you all the happiest of summers, and I thank you for having been, indeed, brave, true soldiers. In these last few minutes let me say to each one, I know how hard you have tried, and how discouraged you have been sometimes, and I am proud of each boy and girl; glad that you are *my* boys and *my* girls, and proud of the happy year we have spent together."

They had begged to go to the station with her, and Jean had not had the heart to refuse, so they started off down the familiar road. Granny Wilson came out to see them pass and waved her hand while she called:

"Good-bye, Miss Mitchell. Don't forget to write."

"I'll remember. Good-bye."

There was Mrs. Maloney by her front gate, flapping her apron and exclaiming:

"A plisant vacation to ye, teacher! May the good saints bring ye back safe!"

It was a funny procession, halted at every house along the road. Harry had her umbrella, Joe her valise, Freddie carried an immense bunch of flowers sent by his mother, and Susie, Frank and Emma were laden with fruit and candy designed for her special delectation. Jean had to smile every time she looked around, while the thought of the other passengers made her flush, but not for worlds would she have wounded the loving hearts that were striving to show their affection. Just as the train swung into sight around the bend in the distance a big boy came running up to the station. It was Ben, breathless and eager.

"Had to come to say good-bye," he explained. "Miss Mitchell, I want to thank you for all the kindness you've shown me. I'll never forget it, and I wish you a very pleasant vacation."

The little speech had so manly a ring that Jean frankly spoke her thought.

"That was splendid, Ben," she said.

The big fellow grew a little redder.

"Did it sound all right? I practiced it a good many times out in the corn-field so as to get it straight."

The train was close at hand. There was time for a last hand-clasp, a few parting words, and then half smiling, half sighing, Miss Mitchell stepped into the car.

Ben, Harry, Jack and Joe followed close behind. They arranged her bundles, saw that she was comfortable, and then lingered a second.

"Thank you, boys. Go now, or you will be carried along," and Miss Mitchell smiled at them through a sudden mist.

"Wouldn't care much," Joe muttered huskily. "Good-bye, Miss Mitchell."

"Good-bye, boys."

They jumped from the platform not an instant too soon. There was a flutter of white handkerchiefs, a chorus of farewells, then the train went puffing on its way, past the winding country road, across the shining river, carrying Jean homeward, for the long, happy year was over.

The few passengers on the train had watched the little drama with curiosity and interest.

"She must be some royal personage, mother," one young gentleman whispered mischievously to his companion.

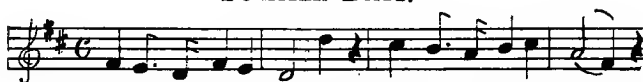
"Hush, Maurice. She is a teacher. I suppose it is the last day of school and the boys and girls came to see her off."

Maurice gave a shrug, but something in the frank face of the unconscious girl appealed to his chivalry.

"A teacher!" he said with new respect. "Well! she must be one of the right kind."

Jean sat erect, her cheeks glowing, her eyes shining, for was not the dear world of home before her? The mother-face, the mother-love were waiting, and mingling with the roar of the revolving wheels she heard the music of the June song.

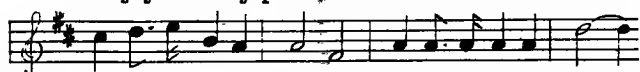
SUMMER DAYS.



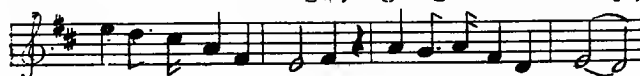
Beautiful days of summer, smiling on land and sea,



Softly your fairy promise comes in the hush to me.



Warm with the smiles of sunlight, ling'ring in woodland ways,



Bright with the bloom of roses, beautiful summer days!

Beautiful days of summer,
 Gay as a golden dream;
 Sweet with the breath of clover,
 Fairest of all you seem.
 Yours is the morning splendor,
 Yours is the noontide haze,
 Yours is the harvest glory;
 Beautiful summer days!

THE END.

